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THE POWER OF THE KEYS

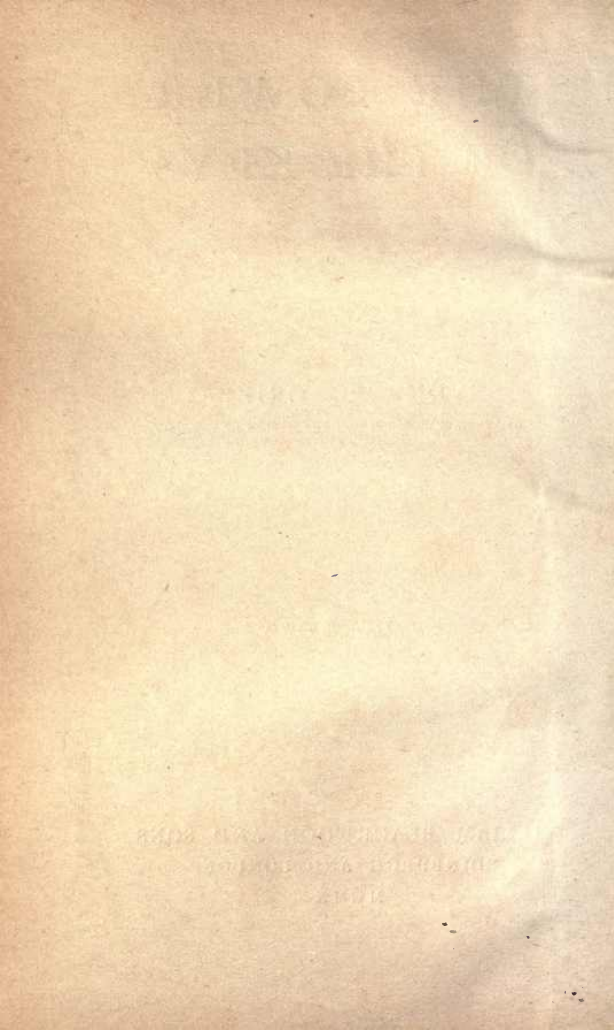
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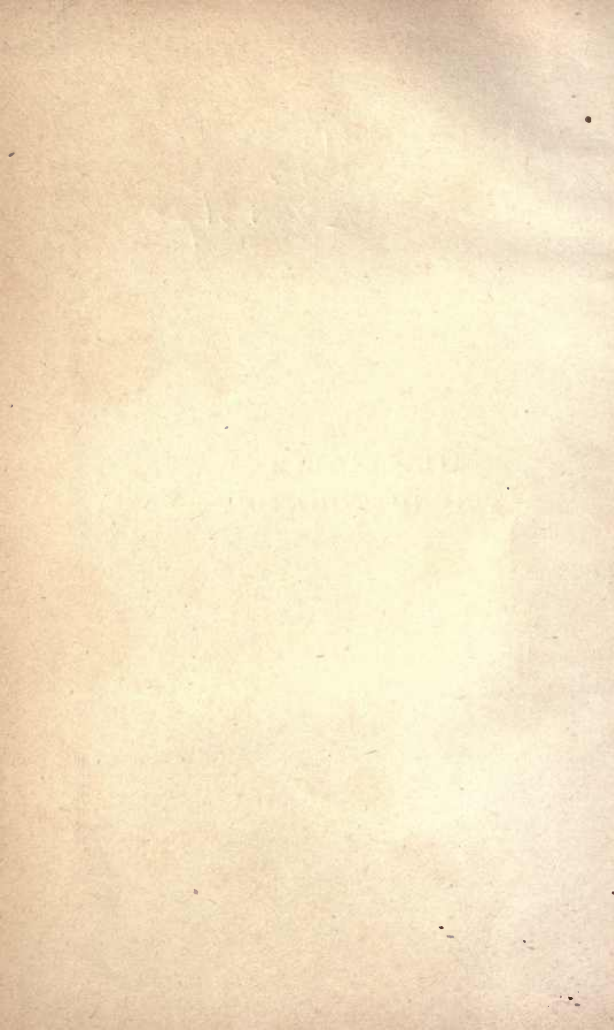
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The Power of the Keys.

CHAPTER I.

BRITAIN BREAKS FAITH.

AT the foot of the Chabi Pass, among the mountains which separate the native state of Bala from the great British province of Granthistan, stands the St Martin's Mission Hospital.

"You Padris have a good eye for strategic points." It was the British Resident in Bala who made the remark, when he was asked by a zealous mission secretary to use his influence with the Rajah for the grant of a site. "The Chabi Pass is one of the keys of India."

"One of the keys of Central Asia, where you won't let us go. Keys keep people in, as well as out. But we can only send two women to occupy this post," added the missionary hastily; "so you needn't be afraid of their making any unauthorised expeditions."

"I'll take good care they don't!" was the grim reply; and when Eleanor Weston, L.R.C.P. & S., and Sister Janie took possession of the bare mud-brick building which was to be the scene of their future labours, it was with this condition plainly stated. If they went so far as to set foot on the other side of a hill known as the Look-out—so they were informed by the urbane gentleman in authority, who took an early

opportunity of welcoming and warning them—they would instantly, if they survived the indiscretion, be deported from Bala and returned in disgrace to Granthistan. Duly impressed, they promised obedience, and kept their promise honourably, finding an ample field for their activities within the prescribed limits. Since those early days, the hospital had thrown out various excrescences—an isolation-ward here, an operating-room there. The wards were gay with pictures and texts, the beds with patchwork quilts, and several native girls, in a uniform of white and scarlet which was a quaint compromise between European and Indian ideas, and made them look like imperfectly disguised boys, kept Sister Janie more busily and anxiously on the alert, so she assured them, than the most heedless probationer that had ever afflicted her in England. Distinguished visitors to the state were duly conducted to St Martin's, and wrote pleasant things in the hospital book, distributing sweetmeats on their departure, if they were generous-minded, to the curious little colony which had sprung up round the two Englishwomen—converts with their children, foundlings, famine orphans, and hopeless invalids cast out by their fellow-villagers.

Past the hospital ran the long stretch of road which starts from Granthistan, skirts Bala, and passing through the Debatable Land, links Bala-tarin, the furthest British outpost, with the Empire and civilisation. The white thread—as imposing in its symbolism, if not in its durability, as the Roman roads of Europe—held a fascination for Eleanor-Weston, in spite of, or perhaps on account of, her promise to the Resident; and in her scanty moments of leisure her eyes seldom failed to turn to the curve in which it vanished round the Look-out. "Central Asia is my 'Behind the Ranges,'" she said once, looking up to the white peaks beyond which lay the forbidden country, once ruled, if chroniclers told true, by Christian kings, but now closed to the ambassadors of Christ. Sister Janie's eyes were also wont to seek the road,

but in the opposite direction. She looked down it towards India, the great sea of life which in the hot weather overflowed its banks and surged up into Bala. Down there were soldiers and civilians, chained to the oar, urging onward the imperial galley; down there also the heroic women who cheered their toil. Janie took a lively interest in her fellow-creatures, and it was a personal satisfaction to her when a fever-stricken wreck, carried past below St Martin's towards the happy valley beyond the mountains, was seen to return some months later barely recognisable as a sunburnt hunter with nerves of iron. Her observations were not taken solely from the hospital verandah, for she was much in request among the sojourners in the valley. "She is far too good-looking for a missionary," said one great lady who tried in vain to secure her as one of a boating-party—"or rather, too smart," with a sudden recollection of various pretty, dowdy girls in floppy hats and badly fitting coats and skirts to whom she had been "nice" in other hill-stations. But a missionary Janie was, and she did not forget the fact. Her social experiences were strictly confined to her furloughs, and if they supplied material for endless conversations with Eleanor afterwards, they never drew her heart aside by one hair's-breadth from St Martin's, where, as it pleased her to reflect, she and her friend were alike indispensable and complementary to one another. Whole villages would bring their disputes to Eleanor to settle, but a child that had cut its finger or lost its doll carried its tears instinctively to Janie—not because the "Doctor Miss Sahiba" was harsh or unapproachable, but because to her things needed explaining, while Janie understood what was the matter without being told.

It was a Sunday afternoon towards the end of May, and Janie had held Sunday-school with the children and taken them out for a walk, attended at a discreet distance by old Saif-ud-din, the hospital porter, armed with a stick like a wand of office. Eleanor's Bible-class for the nurses took, as was natural, a longer

time, and after it there were usually two or three cases of conscience to be disposed of in private. To-day Vashti, the head ward-nurse (she owed her name to her father, an austere native pastor, who considered the unfortunate queen's behaviour a commendable example of feminine modesty), complained that Nani, the village-nurse, had given her *gali*¹ because she rebuked her for the untidy state of her room—an inspection of which was no part of Vashti's duties. Nani, a cheerful, honest, hard-working soul, but as rough as the village people among whom she went, admitted the use of the bad language complained of, but retorted with a counter-accusation of Vashti as *zabardast*. When both had been reasoned with, and a semblance of reconciliation induced, Miss Lilla D'Costa, the Eurasian dispenser, who attended the class in the capacity strictly of an assistant, not of a scholar, intimated tearfully that she had detected a (wholly imaginary) change in Miss Weston's manner towards her during the last few days, and wished to be told to which of her many faults she was to attribute it. She was not to be comforted without further floods of tears, which would once have driven Eleanor to the verge of distraction, but which she had learnt to regard as the necessary concomitant of the solid virtues which Miss D'Costa really possessed. The little dark woman went away happy in the loan of a devotional book which the Bishop had sent to Miss Weston as a memento of a visit of his to the hospital, and Eleanor mounted rather wearily the steps which led to her usual watch-tower at the corner of the roof. It was late for Janie and the children to be out, and she watched anxiously till she saw them coming down the road, Janie's cloak blowing wildly behind her as she carried the youngest and fattest of the band, while the rest, a motley group, in clothes contributed by sympathisers in England, and composed largely of patch-work, struggled to hold each a fold of her skirt. Eleanor hurried down to meet them, and despatched

¹ Abuse.

the children quickly to their special guardian, a convert named Joanna, who ruled supreme—though in due subordination to the Miss Sahibs—in her own part of the compound.

"Oh, Burree,¹ such a lovely walk!" said Janie breathlessly, unfastening her cloak. "I took the children nearly half-way to the Look-out."

"Janie, how could you? They must be dead."

"Oh, I carried the little ones by turns all the way back, and they didn't seem tired. But, Burree, we saw a camp—a Sahibs' camp—pitched in that level place by the river."

"Not in the usual place—so far away? And we have heard nothing of any new Sahibs. Who can it be?"

"The children said it was Buttunt Sahib."

"Of course. They don't recognise the existence of any other Sahib. His very name calls up sweets to them."

"Doesn't it? They began at once, in that absurd chant of theirs: 'Buttunt Sahib is coming, is coming, the protector of the poor, the feeder of the hungry, the mighty, the wealthy Buttunt Sahib—may he be victorious over his enemies! Many servants attend him, each man with belt and badge, like the servants of the Great Lord Sahib, and all bearing trays—great trays, enormous trays, piled up, overflowing with sweets. Sweets for me, O my sister; sweets for thee, O my sister! Twelve trays for the Bari Miss Sahiba, nine trays for the Sister Miss Sahiba, and for every soul on the compound six trays each!'"

"Patients and all?" asked Eleanor.

"That was just what I asked them, and Topsy replied promptly that the patients wouldn't be allowed to eat theirs, and so the children would benefit. They can't forget the feast Mr Arbuthnot gave them in honour of his recovery; it is handed on as a glorious, heart-stirring tradition to the new ones as they come. Oh, Burree, don't

¹ Short for Bari Miss Sahiba, chief European lady.

you wish you could arrange for a succession of bears to maul one generous-minded Sahib each season—not more, we are not bloodthirsty—within a convenient distance of your gates? Think of that lovely operating-table!”

“No, I don’t,” said Eleanor sharply. “We must have tea at once, Janie, or we shall be late for hospital service.”

Janie smiled a little wickedly as she yielded to the insistent tone. She knew very well the thought that was in Eleanor’s mind. Since the time, three years ago, when young Arbuthnot had been carried back to his camp below the hospital plateau badly injured by a bear, and the Doctor Miss Sahiba had added to her labours by riding down twice a-day to attend him until he could be moved to the European hospital at Sheonath, the state capital, her patient had shown his gratitude by visiting St Martin’s punctiliously whenever he was in the neighbourhood—and he appeared to enjoy an incredible amount of leave. Possessing the honest admiration for Janie’s charms often felt by a plain woman for an attractive junior, Eleanor was at no loss to imagine what was the magnet that drew him, and this suggested possibilities which as the head of the hospital she was bound strenuously to discourage, even while, as a woman, she regarded them with not unapproving sympathy. As for what Janie thought on the matter, Janie, like the wise man, did not tell.

In the bustle of the usual Monday rush of out-patients the next morning, the mysterious camp by the river was forgotten; but in the afternoon, when Eleanor had leisure to breathe, and to wonder whether an expected summons to a bad case in the village would come before tea or obligingly wait till after it, the sound of a pony’s feet in the courtyard drew her to the verandah. The servant’s announcement, “Buttunt Sahib hai,” was not needed, for the young man’s smiling eyes met hers as he came up the steps. She smiled involuntarily in return, for her heart warmed towards him, as it always did when he was present. “He has such

honest eyes," she had said once to Janie, with a sudden effort at self-justification, which Janie seemed to think unnecessary. But this was not all. The casual observer saw only a dark-haired young fellow, rather slim for his height, and with noticeably small hands and feet; but to Eleanor, who knew that Arbuthnot's grandfather had married a lady of the Mohammedan family which had ruled Bala until the British occupation handed it over to the present Hindu dynasty, it was a constant interest to seek some trace of his ancestry in his voice and ways.

"Forgive me," he said, offering her his left hand, and exhibiting the right swathed in bandages. "I really did try to pass your gates this time without inflicting a call upon you, but I must throw myself on your mercy. May I be an out-patient?"

"Once more? We always expect to see old patients again, you know. Come into the surgery. What is it?"

"It was only a thorn to begin with, but what with letting it alone at first, and trying everything that the other fellows and I could think of afterwards, it's got rather bad."

"You ought to have seen a doctor before," said Eleanor severely, as she stripped off the amateur dressings. "You might have lost your hand. How could you pass Sheonath without going to Dr Weaver?"

"Oh, but we have been up in the wilds, you know, and we were not going to Sheonath at all—at least, I wasn't."

"How many of you are there? Now I am going to hurt you."

"I knew you were. Otherwise you would have said, 'What a hand for a man!' or something equally unpleasant. How many of us? Two other fellows and me. If I don't reappear in due time, they are to come and see what's happened to me. One is a cousin of my mother's, Brooke, who was Commissioner of Gangur. I know you and he will take to one another. There's a brisk strenuousness about him that will appeal to

you. The other, Cholmeley-Smith, is a globe-trotter, a good-natured ass that we happened to pick up."

He spoke fast and rather at random, as Eleanor did various unpleasant things to the injured hand, finally enveloping the thumb in a highly superior bandage. Then he smiled confidently at her.

"After that, you will ask us to tea, won't you? You see, I tried hard not to come, or I shouldn't have waited till it got so bad. I believe I hear the other fellows coming. They don't know you as I do, of course, and they weren't going to leave you time to murder me."

"Oh, bring them into the drawing-room," said Eleanor, laughing in spite of herself, "and I will tell Sister Janie."

"Oh yes, we must have her. Cholmeley-Smith will want to see over the place. He has a great idea of being fair, and poking into everything for himself. I believe he's got into trouble several times for insisting on investigating temples."

Janie was already in the drawing-room, looking as dainty in her fresh cap and apron as though the squalid throng of out-patients and the crowded wards, between which her day had been divided, were alike unknown to her, and the khitmatgar was bringing in the tea when Arbuthnot and his friends entered. Mr Brooke proved to be just the spare, grey-haired man, with closely clipped moustache, that Eleanor had expected, but was noticeable for an excessive deliberation in speaking, while Mr Cholmeley-Smith combined the appearance of extreme youth with an intense solemnity of demeanour. He seized upon Janie as his prey, and could be heard urging her to tell him some horrors for his book, while she assured him in vain that she never discussed cases with non-professional visitors. Mr Brooke, sitting beside Eleanor, summed up—so she averred afterwards—herself, Janie, and the room, in a couple of shrewd glances.

"You have a very pleasant time of year for your leave," she said to him.

"I am not on leave," he replied. "I have retired."

"Then you are just visiting Bala before going home?"

"I have been home, and have come out again."

"Ah, you don't know his romantic history," said Arbuthnot. "He is a wicked usurper ousted by the rightful heir. He resigned his appointment and went home to inherit the family baronetcy, and lo and behold! an unknown son of his elder brother turns up."

"And finding myself left with only a younger son's portion, after all——" said Mr Brooke slowly.

"He returns to wander, like a grieving ghost, among the scenes of his former glories," supplied Arbuthnot. "Most luckless position—sort of Mohammed's coffin—neither bureaucrat nor baronet."

"In India I know my way about, at any rate," drawled Mr Brooke. "At home I don't—now."

"But don't you like England?" demanded Eleanor in astonishment.

"To spend my leave in—yes; to settle down in—no."

"Now you have got him on his pet grievance," said Arbuthnot. "The truth is, they didn't make enough of him."

"Quite true." Mr Brooke's eyes met Eleanor's with a whimsical smile. "It was like a living death. 'But yesterday the word of Cæsar Might have stood against the world; now——'" he broke off as if it was too much effort to finish the quotation.

"You see," explained Arbuthnot, "he had been the earthly providence to millions of human beings for so long that he simply couldn't stand finding himself nobody."

"I thought of Parliament," said Mr Brooke, with an approach to indignation. "They told me I was not sufficiently known in the county. Thirty years' service for the Empire——"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Arbuthnot cheerfully. "Who cares for India in comparison with the parish pump?"

"Now there, I must say, you are wrong, Arbuthnot,"

broke in Mr Cholmeley-Smith. "The Radical party, at any rate, takes a keen interest in India. Why else am I here?"

"He's an awful Radical," said Arbuthnot confidentially. "Makes it frightfully hard for Brooke and me when we want to discuss the Government. We daren't even copy Lord Mentmore—who may be supposed to regard it with a sympathetic eye—in calling it 'All the Crotchets.' We call it 'the Omnibus' for peace' sake."

"But why is Mr Cholmeley-Smith out here when his party is in power at last?" asked Eleanor.

"Why, I believe the electors whose suffrages he wooed told him to go home to his mother. Anyhow, they wouldn't have him." Mr Cholmeley-Smith smiled, unmoved. "But if he's a Radical, he's a philosophic one—I will say that for him—so he started out to get a bird's-eye view of the Empire, and decide whether it was worth keeping or not."

"A truly open mind!" said Eleanor.

"No mind was ever so open before," came slowly from Mr Brooke. "He asks every person he meets whether they approve of the British Empire, and puts down the answer. On his voyage home he will look up his notes, and settle the question by the only true Radical test—counting heads."

"If it isn't premature to ask you yet, do you approve of the way in which your friends have treated Lord Cooke?" asked Eleanor of the philosophic Radical.

"So far as I see, he has met with no ill-treatment," was the answer. "His resignation was his own doing."

"Ah, you don't know your India yet," said Janie quickly. "When you are working hard in the hot weather, the sight of a set of questions from home is like a red rag to a bull. We knew it when we were in the plains—didn't we, Burree?—when it came to making out the hospital report. One positively loathed the beautiful neat sheet with the spaces for answers. I always felt I should like to bury it deep at

the bottom of the linen-cupboard, or tear it up and stamp on it."

"But you don't see," persisted Mr Cholmeley-Smith, "that it was a matter of principle. Cooke was known to be the exponent of an aggressive policy. Therefore he had to be kept in check."

"The old myth!" said Mr Brooke contemptuously—"a furiously bellicose Commander-in-Chief declaring war on his own account, and dragging a peace-loving Government into schemes of conquest!"

"Then you don't take the usual civilian view of Lord Cooke's changes?" asked Eleanor.

"I was against him at first—call it civilian jealousy if you like—but once begun, they should have been carried through."

"But the new cantonments and strategic railways have not been abandoned?"

Arbuthnot laughed. "They are not to be pressed forward, and we know what that means. A solitary Sapper encamped in his glory in a wilderness of rotting pegs and stakes, and two or three coolies playing about on an unfinished embankment, which is already half overgrown with bushes."

"The changes went just far enough to disturb the army and unsettle the people generally," said Mr Brooke. "Cut short there, they have done more harm than good."

"Perhaps it's a good thing we have a peace-loving Government after all," said Eleanor. "Oh, but tell me," turning eagerly to Mr Cholmeley-Smith, "you can't surely agree with their Ethiopian policy?"

"So far as the policy is their own, I do implicitly," he answered.

"You think they were right in refusing Rustam Khan the help they had definitely promised?"

"The promise was an unfortunate legacy from their predecessors. But even so, there has been no question of breaking it. When the old King died, and the treaty made with him was renewed with Rustam Khan, it was arranged that we should come to his assistance

if the Scythians invaded Ethiopia. But they have done nothing of the kind."

"But every one knows that Antar Khan has the Scythians behind him. Why, he took refuge with them at once when Rustam Khan ascended the throne, and lived on their side of the border for years."

"Still, they are giving him no actual aid now. Moral support, possibly, but his strongest moral support is the opinion of the Ethiopians themselves. You can't deny that his mother was of royal blood, while Rustam Khan's was not. I have always understood that the old King's final choice of Rustam Khan as his successor came as a considerable surprise, and that nothing but the fact that he was at Kubbet-ul-Haj, and able to control the army and the treasury, secured him the throne. Well, can you imagine that if a majority of Ethiopians prefer the younger brother, we should raise a finger to keep Rustam Khan on the throne? It is no business of ours, and we should certainly not consider Ethiopia worth——"

"An adverse vote in Parliament," suggested Arbuthnot. "Oh, I know you were going to say 'the bones of a single British grenadier,' but what are British grenadiers to you? Now House of Commons votes are something tangible."

"But Rustam Khan claimed our help as soon as Antar Khan appeared near Rahat," objected Eleanor. "He evidently thought the proper moment had come."

"He judged from our old readiness to mix ourselves up in Ethiopian affairs, no doubt. But I am happy to believe that no British government will ever again risk money and men to keep a ruler on the Ethiopian throne against the will of the Ethiopians."

"But the disgrace—the broken promise! Even you can't doubt that Antar Khan is a Scythian *protégé*."

"Say that he is, are we—merely in order to vex Scythia—to thwart the aspirations of the Ethiopians? Let them manage their own affairs in their own way. We have filched enough from them, in all conscience, for the sake of our precious 'scientific frontier.' As to

Scythia, she has too much on her hands just now to meddle."

"Oh, can you tell me, are Scythia and Hercynia going to war?" cried Eleanor.

"I should say not," responded Mr Brooke shortly. "How late is your news?"

"A fortnight-old copy of the 'Pen and Sword,' which Prince George of Agpur sent up with some illustrated papers when he passed on Saturday."

"You don't mean George Brown? I thought his pretensions had been finally squashed," cried Arbuthnot.

"Well, I only know that it said on the card, 'For the Hospital, with Prince George of Agpur's compliments,'" said Eleanor.

"I say, it's a little too much!" said Arbuthnot angrily. The man of whom they spoke was one of the sons of a marriage between the late Maharajah of Agpur and an ambitious Eurasian girl—a marriage solemnised with the full rites of the Christian and Granthi religions, but of which the children were not considered eligible to succeed their father on the *gaddi*. "He must know that the decision against him was final."

"After all, a man may call himself what he likes if he doesn't trade on the name," said Mr Brooke. "He seems to keep away from Agpur."

"Yes, what's he doing up here?" cried Arbuthnot.

"Going to stay with the Rajah, I think," said Eleanor. "They are distant cousins in a way, you know. But surely you must have heard what he was doing?"

"Agpur gossip doesn't reach me now. I am not in that district any longer," he replied, with so much constraint that Eleanor returned hurriedly to the European situation.

"Hercynia and Scythia seemed to be squabbling frightfully, according to the 'Pen and Sword,'" she said.

"Merely a put-up job!" said Mr Brooke drily.

"But do you mean there's no quarrel really?"

"Very much the reverse, so far as Scythia and Hercynia are concerned," said Arbuthnot. "But as regards other nations—well, what do you think of the Emperor Sigismund's saying, at his latest military *tamasha*, that in consequence of a recent triumph of Hercynian diplomacy, which promised a triumph for the Hercynian arms in the near future, a certain sullen and unfriendly nation would be forced to choose between joining whole-heartedly in the peaceful progress of Hercynian world-policy, or being dragged at its victorious chariot-wheels?"

"But what does it mean?"

"Well, the Hercynian papers are labouring to prove that it only means that the difficulty with Scythia is to be submitted to arbitration, but Neustria seems to take it as a warning to re-insure. There are rumours of a secret treaty between Scythia and Hercynia."

"Against us, of course?"

"And Neustria, unless she joins the coalition against us. No, I can't tell you any more. I got that from a 'Pathfinder' which a man going up to Sheonath gave us this morning as he passed. It looks bad, and more unlikely things have happened."

"What's that?" demanded Mr Cholmeley-Smith, who had returned to his siege of Janie—"that absurd scare in the 'Pathfinder'? People ought to be prosecuted for diffusing such lies. Who's going to attack us? Why should they? We are on the best of terms with the whole world. The Jingo press thrives on painting the Hercynian Emperor as a bogey, but all moderate-minded men revere him as the true friend of peace."

"It really is a curious thing," said Mr Brooke slowly, "that your true Radical can never be really friendly with any one but an autocrat—a warlike one for choice."

"Of course," said Arbuthnot. "With any other kind of person it would be a case of two of a trade."

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET AGENT.

"JANIE, you look frightfully tired!" cried Eleanor, when the visitors had departed, after a limited portion of the hospital had been exhibited to Mr Cholmeley-Smith, and he had garnered many statistics in his notebook.

"I suppose I did walk too far yesterday, after all," said Janie, subsiding limply on the sofa.

"That's right; lie down until it's time to go round the wards. Out-patients and a philosophic Radical are enough to tire any one."

"He said I was the first nurse he ever met who wouldn't talk shop to outsiders," laughed Janie. "You had much the best of it, Burree."

"What, that dreadful lazy man? My dear child, I should have liked to be behind him with a broomstick the whole time, to make him get his words out quicker. 'Brisk and strenuous,' that wicked youth called him!"

"You might have known that was humbug," said Janie, who was rather fond of impressing on her friend that she considered Arbuthnot somewhat frivolous and generally ineffective. "Oh, don't sit down to write, Burree. I want to be foolish to-night, and talk about home."

"But I must make out that list of drugs. I mayn't have another moment all the week. You lie down and get a nap—much better for you than talking."

"Oh, Burree," Janie caught Eleanor's hand as she

arranged the cushions, "what a person you are for taking care of people! I can't think why you never married."

"Can't you? I can."

"Oh, then, there was some one," cried Janie, sitting up. "Now you must tell me. Who was he? What happened?"

"My dear Janie, there never was any one. Can't your romantic mind grasp the fact that not only have I never had a love-affair, but I never imagined that I had?"

"Well, I don't know what the men were thinking about!"

"Something else besides plain women with work to do."

"But you are not plain. You are—distinguished-looking."

"Grey hair will make the most commonplace woman distinguished-looking if she happens to have dark eyes."

"You were never commonplace-looking, I am certain. No woman could be who had work like yours, and was as devoted to it as you are."

"Oh, Janie, what a hopelessly feminine point of view! Have you never discovered that a woman who has her work and does it is the most commonplace object in the world to men? They respect her and pass her by."

"Now if a man heard you," said Janie, settling herself comfortably among the cushions, "he would say that disappointment had made you cynical."

"Then he would be wrong. Is it cynical to recognise facts? And disappointment! Why, Janie, I get more happiness out of life than almost any one I know. If I see a pair of lovers, or the right kind of married couple, I can thank God for their happiness with all my heart, and rejoice whenever I think of it. And don't I keep all my illusions?"

"Oh, cynic, cynic!" lamented Janie. "What illusions?"

"Can't I believe in men still, which very few

married women seem able to do? Say that a man throws his boots at his bearer, or rages furiously when the curry is not quite right—I don't know it. I don't see that side of him at all."

"But you do know it. You have just said so."

"I know that men do it, but I don't know that that particular man does. I hope he doesn't. That's my illusion."

"If you recognise it as an illusion, it isn't an illusion."

"That's hair-splitting. And now it's time to go the rounds, and you haven't had your nap, and I haven't done my list."

Sleeping the sleep of the weary after her hard day, Eleanor was roused by the voice of one of the night-nurses.

"Miss Sahib, the Pirzada Hafiz from the upper village is here. His wife is very ill, and he wants the Doctor Miss Sahiba at once."

It was the expected call, and Eleanor rose and dressed hastily, saw that everything likely to be needed was in her bag, and went out. In the verandah was old Nani, awakened almost by main force, and still testifying her sleepiness by grunts of displeasure as she shivered and wrapped her *chadar* closer round her. The husband of the sick woman came forward and salaamed, and Saif-ud-din appeared with a lantern, for the path to the upper village was dangerously steep. The fight between life and death in the Pirzada's house was a long one, and the dawn was breaking when Eleanor and her escort retraced their steps to the hospital. Nani was awake and talkative now, and inclined to see ghosts in every corner.

"Oh, Miss Sahib, what's that?" she cried in real terror, clutching Eleanor's arm, as they were passing the large house occupied by the Begum Sahiba, the great lady of the neighbourhood, a Mohammedan widow whose age and wealth were alike supposed

to be incalculable. A man who had been standing in the doorway moved forward, with a "Salaam, Miss Sahib." As he put his hands together, Eleanor saw a surgical bandage on the right thumb, a bandage which she had herself affixed not so many hours before.

"It is Barakat's son!" said Nani, with ineffable relief. Barakat was the Begum Sahiba's chief female attendant and confidant. "O Ghulam Qadir, why dost thou play the ghost and frighten the Miss Sahib?"

"What is Barakat's son doing out of doors at this hour?" said Eleanor sharply, scrutinising the man by the light of Saif-ud-din's lantern. The disguise was perfect, but she could not mistake her own dressing.

"This slave is on the business of the Begum Sahiba," he answered unblushingly. "Is it the will of the Presence that the dust of the earth should appear to-morrow in her medicine-room for the further healing of his hurt?"

"Yes, come at noon," was the curt reply. "Who is this Ghulam Qadir?" asked Eleanor of Nani as they passed on. "I never saw him——" she altered the form of her sentence—"I did not know he was Barakat's son when I dressed his thumb."

"I think he is a soldier in the army of the Sarkar," answered the old woman, "so fine a young man is he, and the light of Barakat's eyes. They say he is also high in favour with the Begum Sahiba herself. Whenever he comes to the village on leave he is admitted to her presence, and there is talk among the servant-people that she will make him her heir."

Eleanor walked on in silence, much perturbed. From Arbuthnot's manner the afternoon before she had suspected that he had for some reason lost his appointment in the Police, and she had wondered how he could afford to undertake an expensive shooting-tour. She could hardly believe that he could have sunk so low as to live upon the bounty of a native woman, rich and elderly though the Begum might be, but the fact

that he should adopt a disguise and shelter himself under the obvious falsehood of a relationship with Barakat made her very uneasy. Janie wondered at her silence in the morning, but attributing it to fatigue, forbore to worry her with questions, and Eleanor kept her discovery to herself, hoping against hope that there might be some good reason for her favourite's conduct. But she received another shock when, glancing into the courtyard as she passed along the verandah, she saw the self-styled Ghulam Qadir sitting comfortably on the ground at the gate, listening with attentive respect to the words of wisdom of Saif-ud-din.

"To come here in that dress!" she said to herself angrily. "He means to brazen it out. Well, since he's so fond of Saif-ud-din, he shall have enough of him."

She worked sternly through the morning, persistently conscious of the idle figure at the gate, which she as persistently ignored, and it was not till well after twelve that she dismissed the nurses to whom she was lecturing, and sent out to summon Ghulam Qadir into the surgery. He entered with a respectful salaam, and stood waiting with downcast eyes. Eleanor cast a hasty glance outside to make sure that none of the girls were lingering near.

"I wonder you venture to keep up this mummery in the daytime!" she cried, her pent-up indignation breaking forth.

"Saif-ud-din and the old woman both heard you tell me to come," he replied. "What would they have thought if I had not?"

"But to come so early! to lounge at the gate all morning!"

"I have my own reasons for cultivating the venerable Saif-ud-din, and to come two or three hours early is merely in keeping with my disguise. I am not taking any unnecessary risks."

"But what is it? What have you done?" cried Eleanor.

An irrepressible smile flitted across Arbuthnot's face. "When I want true charity in future, I shall always

go to a good woman for it. Confess now, Miss Weston, you think I have gone pretty far down the wrong road?"

"If you can tell me you haven't, I shall be inexpressibly relieved," said Eleanor fervently.

"But that is weak, surely, to take my uncorroborated word for it?" he gibed. "Don't you think it would be as well to look at this?" holding out his injured hand, "or the length of our interview may cause surprise." Mechanically Eleanor began to unfasten the dressing. "Now I won't leave you suspended between hope and fear any longer. What you call this mummery is not undertaken for pleasure. I am not in the Police now, but on special work."

"A spy?" asked Eleanor, in no very encouraging tone.

"A secret agent—don't you like the term better? It was at Agpur I found out that I could pass as a native, and I used to dress up and go round to my men's posts to see how far they obeyed orders. They really used to think I was in communication with Shaitan, when I exposed their nightly delinquencies the next day. Then I broke up the Amir Mohammed gang of coiners, and after that I was shunted into this business."

"Now I see why you were sorry to find that Prince George of Agpur was in Bala."

"Yes. Not so much for fear of his recognising me in disguise, for that secret never got out, or I should hardly be standing here to-day. But Prince George and the rest of that mongrel lot had a crow or two to pick with me in my police-character, and I don't think they have forgotten it."

Eleanor smiled involuntarily at the instinctive identification of himself with Europeans. "You call yourself Barakat's son," she said pointedly.

"Well, she is my foster-mother, at any rate. But it's the Begum who is really my relation."

"The Begum? How is she related to you?"

"She says she's my great-grandmother. But if she

had put it a generation or two further back, I shouldn't be surprised—she looks so old."

"Your great-grandmother? How extraordinary! How——"

"May I come and see you some other time in my English clothes? I don't want to provoke comment by staying now, but there are things I should like to ask you."

"I have to ride this afternoon to the village under the Look-out. If you could join me casually as I come back——"

"All right. I can't shoot with this hand, and the others have an invitation to the Rajah's preserves. By the bye, the bold bad baronet—Brooke, I mean—is in the secret of my disguise; Cholmeley-Smith most emphatically is not."

After lunch, during which her cheerfulness astonished Janie, Eleanor set out on her ride to the distant village. She was detained longer at the case than she had expected, and it was late in the afternoon when she walked her pony down the steep bridle-path and reached the great road. It was therefore extremely natural that the horseman who was riding down it should pause and offer his escort, speaking in loud and hearty tones for the benefit of her *sais* and his.

"Why, Miss Weston, this is lucky! May I ride with you? I have gone as far as the limit, and smoked a pipe there, peering into the unknown and wishing I could plunge into it to-night."

The two natives fell behind, probably to exchange complaints of their respective employers, if their tones were to be trusted, and Arbuthnot turned a laughing face to Eleanor.

"Now here I am, prepared to answer any and every question you like to put. I see you are overflowing with them."

"First, then, why conceal your relationship to the Begum from us? You always encouraged us to believe we were your friends."

"Because of an ingrained habit of deceit, I'm afraid—or shall we call it foresight? You see, I only knew of it myself just before the bear got me three years ago."

"You didn't know of it when you came to India?"

"Not a scrap. My grandfather was awfully good to the old lady—I'm sure she was old even then. She always says, 'The pundit-people may talk against the English, but I am always on their side, for the sake of my daughter's husband.' She did some service to the Government at the time of the Occupation, so she has been handed on as a legacy from Resident to Resident ever since. My father used to come up and see her when he was a young man, but when he married, my mother hated the connection—I suppose it was natural from her point of view,—and when he died, she refused to hold any communication with the Begum, and brought me up quite in ignorance of her existence. I think she almost hated Barakat, too, but the Begum took her into her service, and they waited for me together. They knew that any descendant of my grandfather was bound to come to India in time, you know, and I did, though I never guessed why my mother was so bitterly opposed to it. She would rather I had gone anywhere else in the world, I believe; but nothing else would do."

"But she was reconciled to it at last?"

"She said it was in the blood, and there was no use in fighting against it. So I came out, and the two old ladies up here kept a strict eye on me by means of spies. They calculated that any man who was stationed at Agpur was bound to take sick-leave to Bala sooner or later, and they were about right. I came up, quite unsuspecting, and at my first camp on this side the border I was waited on by the Begum's trusted scribe, with a flowery Persian letter from Barakat, reminding me of the old days, and entreating to see my face again. But as she was *pardah* now, and could not possibly introduce a European into the discreet household of the Begum, would I be so good as

to put on native dress at old Fazl Ali's house in the village, and appear in that? It sounded rather a lark, and I did. Poor old Barakat was nearly out of her wits with joy at seeing me, but I couldn't make out why she should be so nervous. I did all I could to comfort her, but it wasn't until the Begum popped out from behind a curtain, and explained, that I understood. She meant to sample me before she acknowledged me as a relative, you see. And since then I have been to see her whenever I have been up here."

"But why all this mystery and secrecy?" cried Eleanor. "You are not ashamed of the poor old lady?"

"Rather not. It wouldn't be much good if I was, for most people know that my grandfather married a princess of Bala. But I had thoughts of frontier work even then, and it gave me such a splendid jumping-off place. If I was to use her house in my expeditions, I must only appear there as a native, or the villagers would soon begin to notice that the Begum had a Farangi great-grandson, and Barakat a son, of precisely the same height, who never by any chance showed up at the same time."

"But does the Begum like it?"

"Oh, I'm an awful disappointment to her. At first she was always wanting to give me money to buy promotion with, or to win the favour of people in high places, or something equally benighted. She knows now that I won't take money from her, so she consoles herself by promising to arrange a tip-top marriage for me. Nobody lower than a Princess, or at the very least the Viceroy's daughter, will be considered in the running, so she can't get very far. But, do you know, that operating-table which my 'family' gave to the hospital after you cured me was practically a gift from her?"

"But she has never been very sympathetic, though she helped in building the hospital," said Eleanor.

"She wasn't then. She said, 'It is a shame for the son of princes to remain indebted to a European

woman and a stranger. Tell me, then, light of my eyes, what sum is needed to clear thee from this obligation?' and she lugged up a great money-bag from under her cushions."

"I don't think I would have accepted it if I had known——"

"Oh yes, you would. You couldn't have let the patients suffer for your pride, you know. And the Begum would have died of mortification if she had thought I was still in your debt. She is awfully kind to me now, and lets me make use of her house at all hours, consoling herself for my extraordinary proceedings by recalling traits of my grandfather's which account for them."

"But do you mean that no one in her house suspects who you are?"

"Barakat knows, of course, and Fazl Ali, but no one else. To the rest I am Barakat's son, and they are frightfully jealous of the Begum's unaccountable favour for me. Gokal Das, the man of business, is the worst. To see the glare in his eyes while he cringes before me is like a play."

"Well, of course, you are the best judge, but I think this concealment is a great mistake," said Eleanor resolutely.

"I am the best judge," he said, more sternly than she had ever heard him speak. "Wait till you know something of the circumstances before you blame me."

"I know there must be secret agents, and that they are specially needed up here, but I don't like to think of you as one." Eleanor was apologetic but staunch.

"Not if I can serve the country better in that way than any other, particularly just now? Did you notice what Brooke said yesterday about the dispute between Scythia and Hercynia being a put-up job? Our great statesmen at home don't realise it. But I can tell you who does—the Xipanguese Government, and they have warned us to keep our eye on Asia, not on Europe at all."

"It means a Scythian invasion of India, then?"

"Exactly, while Hercynia picks a quarrel with us and prevents our sending reinforcements from home. We know that Scythia has been concentrating troops on the Ethiopian frontier for months—even years—past; we know that when she gave shelter to the Ethiopian pretender she made friends through him with all his supporters; and we know that she has two strategic railways, terminating—for the moment—within striking distance of Rahat, by which she can pour in men and supplies. Then, what has happened to all the troops who ought to have returned to Europe after the Far-Eastern War? The right proportion of them have evacuated the disputed territory—the Xipanguese have seen to that—but they have not got back to Scythia. Where are they? Why, some of them on the Ethiopian frontier, and some encamped along the line of the Far-Eastern Railway. What can that mean but a simultaneous attack on us and Xipangue?"

"But surely the Home Government must see it?"

"Not they. They are so busy shouting, 'We are peaceful, You are peaceful, The whole world is peaceful,' that they drown all the noises they don't want to hear. Every man that tries to bring the truth home to them is an alarmist, and alarmists deserve death without benefit of clergy. And we here know not only that Scythia is preparing to spring, but that India is prepared to make things easy for her."

"But how can you know that?"

"By going in and out among the people as one of themselves, in the way you think so wrong. They are all expecting an invasion, and, whether from discontent, or love of fighting, or love of loot, they will join the stronger side, which at the first go-off is bound to be Scythia's."

"But at any rate the present Government has redressed their grievances," objected Eleanor.

"That's just what it has not done. When it came in, the Congress-wallahs thought the Millennium had arrived. Funny sort of time a Congress-wallah's Mil-

lennium would be, wouldn't it? But with the worst will in the world to pull the fabric of British authority to pieces, they have had to go slowly, and the men on the spot have conscientiously acted as a drag on the wheel. Therefore the Congress-wallahs, finding that even a government of cranks can't bring in the Millennium, look for some one who will at any rate promise it, and the mass of the people, whose hopes have been excited in vain, are ready for any mischief. Of course the change isn't entirely due to the present Government, but they have brought it to a head."

"No, it has been going on for more than a year," said Eleanor. "I have noticed it during my ten years in India—the increasing impatience of European control. I find it even among the Christians, even in Vashti and my girls here—a sort of sullenness under direction, as if they would say, 'Why should you lord it over us? We are as good as you.' And the feeling is purely national, not racial, for I asked some American missionaries whom I met at Nanakpur, at Conference. They all agreed that when they were once known to be American, they escaped the dislike with which the English were regarded."

"That was exactly one of the things I wanted to ask you. Well, I fancy your Christians will only find they have exchanged King Log for a particularly active King Stork if they pass under Scythian rule. And another thing I want to know is, if I come and ask you to engage me as Saif-ud-din's assistant, will you take me on? I don't think Saif-ud-din would object, and the Begum will give me a recommendation."

"I don't like lending myself to——"

"A deception? Of course not. But it's a matter of importance. I want to get up to Bala-tarin and see what is going on beyond the outpost. There are persistent rumours of the concentration of Scythian troops there too. If I could verify that, it would be a new fact which might stir the Government to caution, if not to action. We have cried 'Wolf!' about the Ethiopian frontier so long, you see. But I must have

a reason, or your Rajah here, whose behaviour has been distinctly suspicious of late, will refuse to let me go. But if that chief, whose wife you cured of rheumatism three years ago, were to send down for some of the same medicine for himself, would it not be natural for some one you could trust to take it to him and see that it was properly applied?"

"Not natural, but I suppose possible. But why not go in your own character?"

"Exactly, why not? Brooke and I have been industriously indoctrinating Cholmeley-Smith with a desire to go up to Bala-tarin, but he doesn't take to it as we could wish. He is our trump-card, you know. What with his own idea of his political importance, and the way he talks of all the cranks in the Cabinet as his dearest friends, the natives think him somebody very big indeed. He was just the blind we wanted for our expedition. Brooke has I.C.S. stamped all over him, and I am known to a good many more evil-doers than is at all convenient, so we thought we were in luck when we came on Cholmeley-Smith thirsting to finish off his globe-trotting properly by a little shooting up here. It has worked excellently so far. Brooke dry-nurses Cholmeley-Smith when I am off on my own work, and we play into each other's hands by gently impelling him in the right direction. But now the Rajah and all the pundits are making a terrible fuss about the way to Bala-tarin being blocked with snow-slides and landslips and I don't know what, and Cholmeley-Smith doesn't half like it. At present they promise to get us horses and coolies by the day after to-morrow, but I doubt very much if they will."

• "Then you will be here for the King's Birthday?" Bala is so far behind the age as still to keep this festival in May, for the excellent reason that in November there is hardly a European in the state.

"Rather! and for the Rajah's dinner. Cholmeley-Smith wouldn't miss that on any account. Absolute ignorance of the etiquette of the occasions and diseased self-importance—well, perhaps Brooke and I

have stuffed him a little—have made him certain that he will be toasted as the distinguished visitor, and have to reply. He goes about jotting down happy turns of speech in his notebook. But after the dinner we must see whether we can go up to Bala-tarin together, or whether Brooke must judiciously attract Cholmeley-Smith in some other direction, while I take service with you."

CHAPTER III.

THE KING'S BIRTHDAY.

THE King's Birthday was a great day at St Martin's. Very early in the morning Eleanor and Janie received visits of congratulation from their dependants—a ceremony Janie loved, because she said it made one feel as if one belonged to the Royal Family oneself. The wards were decorated with branches of trees and artificial flowers, and from the flagstaff floated a large Union Jack, sent out by friends at home. When it arrived the stripes had proved to be wrongly arranged, which so sorely afflicted Eleanor's soul that she and Janie sacrificed a large portion of their next holiday to the task of unpicking and remaking it. The nurses were resplendent in new white tunics bound with scarlet, and the children, who had a holiday, strolled about in their Sunday clothes, chanting a dirge-like chorus in honour of "the Emperor glorious as Jamshid, whose throne is supported by angels." Topsy—whose real name was Thomasina, as requested by the elderly lady in England who paid for her support—was the leader of the singing, as of everything else, and the proceedings were interrupted by frequent squabbles with her rival, Jinda, whom she accused of improvising alterations of her own. The dissension was only half-hearted, however, for the children, who were always to be found where they had no business to be, had detected the mysterious arrival of various inviting-looking baskets and trays during the morning, and they kept an eye on the gateway, that they might be

ready to herald the expected appearance of Arbuthnot. It was Mr Brooke, however, who rode up in the afternoon, prepared to preside at the distribution of the feast, and Topsy covered herself with glory by the deft way in which she substituted "Barūk Sahib" for "Buttunt Sahib" in the chant of welcome, while the heedless Jinda continued to hymn the absent one.

"All the same, I am only here to represent Arbuthnot," said Mr Brooke to Eleanor. "He is technically present, you know."

"Which means, I suppose, that you want people to think he is here?" said Eleanor. "Where is Mr Cholmeley-Smith?"

"Making notes on his shirt-cuff in view of to-night, I believe. Are we to see you at the great affair?"

"No, we are going to give the patients a magic-lantern entertainment, and it needs one of us to work the lantern and one to speak. But I could really have managed with Miss D'Costa, if Sister Janie would have gone. I am sorry she won't, for we shall never have such a chance again. The banquet always takes place at Sheonath, but this year the Rajah has invited every one out here to celebrate the completion of this new hunting-palace. Have you seen the wonderful banquetting-hall the people talk of?"

"No, I believe its splendours are to burst on our dazzled senses to-night. There is quite a town of tents in the park. I called on the Resident before I came up here; he had just come in—delighted with all the arrangements. By the way, I believe the Agpur man is largely responsible for them. He is in great form—apparently quite accepted as the Rajah's cousin."

"The old Rajah would never acknowledge the relationship," said Eleanor.

"No, but this new youth seems glad of such moral support as the fellow can give him. I don't think it'll do him any good."

"How unfair you all are to poor Prince George!" said Janie, who had joined them. "I think he is so nice. He has sent sweets for the children to-day."

"Happily there is medical aid at hand," said Mr Brooke.

"Do you mean he would poison them? What a horrid thing to say!"

"Nonsense, Janie! Mr Brooke is only joking," said Eleanor.

"And besides," said Janie, pursuing her own train of thought, "we are going to give his sweets to the women from the camp just above. Not because we think there's anything wrong about them"—as Mr Brooke raised his eyebrows—"but because it is a real triumph, this tribe's coming back now."

"The chief's wife refused to come into hospital some months ago," explained Eleanor. "Now her husband has brought her and entreated us to take her in."

"And all the chief's female relations have come with her, and the sweets will help us to get rid of them peacefully," said Janie. "Oh, why will you turn everything I say into nonsense?" as Mr Brooke smiled involuntarily. "When poor Prince George is behaving so nicely too! I think it is horrid of the Government not to let him succeed his father."

Mr Brooke replied only by a silent smile, which irritated Eleanor exceedingly, from the profound contempt for the female intellect which it conveyed.

"But why not?" persisted Janie. "They were properly married."

"Spare me!" entreated Mr Brooke. "I am not the Government of India. Not that I think it would be good policy to recognise such marriages. Just imagine for one moment the prospect that would be opened up to the aspiring American heiress!"

Janie laughed in spite of herself, and Mr Brooke prepared to take his leave. "Arbuthnot was to have met me here," he said, "but it is so late that I think he must have gone straight to camp. As a matter of fact," he observed in a low voice to Eleanor, "he has been away since last night. Some information came in through a native, and he went off at

once. Cholmeley-Smith thinks only that he started early for this place."

"I wish you could do your work without all this plotting and scheming," said Eleanor sharply.

"So do I, but how is it to be done?"

"What a curious smile he has!" said Janie, when Mr Brooke was gone—"as if he didn't mean to smile, but there was such a tremendous joke he couldn't help it. I always say to myself, 'How coy!' But I think he means to be nice."

"Yes, he improves on acquaintance," said Eleanor. "He doesn't look at one quite so much as if one was a museum specimen as he did the other day."

The hope of being joined by Arbuthnot had kept Mr Brooke at St Martin's later than he had intended, and it was necessary to ride briskly if he was to reach his camp by sunset. Nevertheless he paused several times on the track, to look up some cross-path or over to the opposite heights, for any sign of his cousin, about whom he was beginning to be anxious. He had no idea what direction he had taken, for all he knew came from Arbuthnot's confidential bearer, who had informed him the night before in a hasty whisper that his Sahib had put on his native dress and slipped out of the camp immediately on hearing some bazar rumour from a shikari who had come to receive his orders for the morrow. It was not so much for Arbuthnot's safety that his cousin feared, as for what his absence might portend. The times were dark—in India, at least—to men who, like Mr Brooke, had understanding of them. A sentence that he had heard from Eleanor that afternoon seemed to mingle with the sound of his pony's hoofs and beat upon his brain. "So many years since the Mutiny; so many since Plassey," she had said—and though he tried to put the words aside as the utterance of an imaginative woman, prone from solitude and meditation to attribute a superstitious importance to mere numbers, he could not forget them. Was it not true that each fifty years the colossus of British rule in

India had received a shake, as though to show that it stood on feet of clay after all? The destruction of Calcutta, the affair at Vellore,—small, but charged with great issues,—the Mutiny: and now? What was going on behind the curtain of doubt that had descended over Ethiopia, the chaos of desert and mountain, across which Briton and Scythian glared at each other with mutual distrust?

It was some months now since Rustam Khan, who had succeeded a father resolved to the last on keeping both his mighty neighbours at a safe distance, had asked, on the faith of treaties, for British support in view of the fact that his half-brother, Antar Khan, was disputing his title to the throne. England had covenanted to assist him in case of a Scythian violation of his territory, and when Antar Khan's followers, from their refuge on Scythian soil, began to raid across his borders, he considered that the time had come for the fulfilment of the promise, but the Government of "All the Crotchets" thought otherwise. A few voices were raised in protest against their inaction, among them that of old Sir Dugald Haigh, who had obtained the first treaty with Ethiopia many years before, and for a few days it seemed as though the Opposition and their organs in the press were intending to follow the lead set by his letter in the 'Thunderer.' But public opinion was asleep, or occupied with other matters of greater immediate interest, and accusations of broken faith did not greatly perturb the party in power. It was perhaps too well used to them. Since then a cloud of uncertainty had veiled Ethiopia, lightened only by fitful and contradictory rumours. It was fairly clear that Antar Khan had entered the country and raised his standard, to which his adherents had flocked, and the British agent at Kubbet-ul-Haj detailed the departure of successive forces to put down the rebellion, and the almost daily occurrence of tumults in the capital itself, but all else was doubtful. No one knew which of the brothers was really gaining the mastery,

or even whether it was true that Antar Khan was assisted by Scythian officers in disguise, or—as some informants declared—actually in uniform. The majority of his supporters were to be found in the district surrounding the city of Rahat, remote from the capital and close to the Scythian border, and fighting was understood to be raging throughout that portion of the kingdom.

“Presumably the Ethiopian rebels are rightly struggling to be free,” said Mr Brooke to himself with a grim smile, “and therefore we mustn’t prevent their setting their own house on fire, though ours may be the next to catch.”

The sun was already behind the mountains when he reached his camp, to discover Mr Cholmeley-Smith wandering about in a state of most unphilosophical nervousness.

“I thought you were lost!” was the globe-trotter’s greeting, given with some irritation. “And where’s Arbuthnot?”

“Hasn’t he come in?” asked Mr Brooke, as he dismounted. “We seem to have missed each other most ingeniously. Well, no doubt he’ll turn up before we have finished beautifying.”

But Arbuthnot was still absent when Mr Cholmeley-Smith, in evening dress, presented himself at his companion’s tent, and he showed signs of serious annoyance.

“Look here, Brooke, this is no joke. We shall be late,” he said, for the camp of the three sportsmen was some distance from the town of tents, pitched in the Rajah’s park, which at present accommodated practically the whole European population of the Bala state.

“Well, you ride on, and tell them we’re coming,” returned Mr Brooke easily, “and I’ll ride back towards the hospital, and hurry Arbuthnot up when I meet him. I cannot imagine what he’s about.”

The advice consorted so well with Mr Cholmeley-Smith’s own wishes, that after a little hesitation he

accepted it, and started with his servants in the direction of the hunting-palace, while Mr Brooke, attended only by his *sais* carrying a lantern, mounted a fresh pony and began to retrace his steps up the hill-path. He did not wish to appear at the Rajah's entertainment without Arbuthnot, not knowing what excuse to make for his absence; but when the pony had patiently picked its way upwards for fully half an hour, he made up his mind to turn back. Almost at the same moment there appeared in the circle of light cast by the lantern a man wearing the loose gown of the natives of Bala, the first person met since leaving the camp.

"Have you seen any one on the road?" Mr Brooke asked him.

"No one, sahib, until the light of your honour's presence illuminated the darkness," was the reply, given with respectfully folded hands; then, in a quick whisper in a down-country dialect, "Frightful news! Get rid of this fellow."

"I shall go no further in search of the young Sahib," said Mr Brooke deliberately to the groom. "Return to the camp and tell the servants to meet me at the palace gateway. Give your lantern to this man, that he may light me."

The *sais* obeyed, and Arbuthnot cast a ray of light after his retreating form before he answered his cousin's impatient "Well?" with,

"The Scythians are in the Pass, beyond the Look-out. They will be here in the morning."

"Good heavens! In strong force?"

"Five or six hundred men, I should say. Not many horses; they have probably lost them in the snow."

"But this is child's play! Do they intend to invade India with less than a cavalry regiment?"

"If it's play to them, it's death to us. Don't you realise that the Rajah must be in with them? They couldn't have got past Bala-tarin without his knowing. Whether the garrison have been surprised or turned traitors, the result is the same."

"And he has the Resident and every European in Bala in his power at this moment! We must warn them."

"That's what you say, is it? Well, let us warn them, by all means. But don't break your neck down this track. When we get to the level, I'll run at your stirrup."

"You don't suggest that we should leave them unwarned?"

"Why, what good is it? They might call out the Sheonath Volunteers—thirty valiant men, isn't it? What could they do against the state troops?"

"At any rate the Resident can wire to India."

"No, he can't. If that could have been done, I should have done it. As Barakat's son, I went to the state telegraph-office, and sent off a wire to inquire after my dying uncle at Ranjitgarh. As I hung about the place and refused to depart, the *babu* produced a return message in next to no time, assuring me that the venerable gentleman was better and walking in his garden. That was not the code answer, so it's clear that the wires are cut lower down. I expressed suitable gratitude and wonder, and strolled down the road, only to be turned back by a patrol of the Rajah's troops. No getting the news through that way, you see."

"Then is there nothing to be done?"

"Well, aren't we on the way to warn the Resident, as you wished? There's one thing, and only one, that he could do if we got to him in time, which I don't for a moment think we can. He and the other men could seize the Rajah and George of Agpur, and keep them as hostages with revolvers at their heads. Ever read 'The Critic'? Fine scene there—no one can move for fear of getting somebody else killed."

"But why in the name of wonder didn't you take the news to the Resident at once, and let him have time to make his plans?"

"What good would it have been? The one thing to do was to warn Ranjitgarh, and he couldn't have

got a wire through or sent off a messenger. You don't think they'll have left the private wire untampered with? And as it is—what with crowds of ladies, all in tents, with no possible place of refuge except a palace that is nothing but windows, our fellows in mess-kit, with no proper guards—what is to happen but a massacre, even if we get them warned?"

"At least they won't be cut down in cold blood," said Mr Brooke, quickening the pony's pace as they reached fairly level ground.

"Probably better for the ladies if they surrendered at discretion," came in jerks from Arbuthnot as he ran. "The walls of the banqueting-room were to be lined with troops, do you remember? But we'll give them what chance we can. Turn to the left when you're past this tree. We might be stopped at the gateway, and I can show you another way into the park."

Once among the trees, they were forced to go more slowly; but before very long occasional glimpses of the palace, every outline ablaze with coloured lamps, served to guide them to their goal. When they emerged from the wood into the gardens proper, Arbuthnot paused.

"I'll tie up the pony; we may want him again," he said. "Now, Brooke, your life in your hand! You may possibly get in, as a belated guest, but they won't let me pass in these things. I'll scout for you. The bushes will give us cover enough till we get quite close."

Now running a short distance, now crawling across a patch of illuminated ground, they worked their way towards the palace; but when they reached the edge of the lawn that surrounded it, Arbuthnot gave a groan of disappointment.

"No hope of getting at the Resident now. The Rajah and his attendants have gone into the banqueting-hall. Is it to welcome the guests before dinner, or to give the toasts afterwards? I don't know whether it's midnight or morning. Have you your watch?"

"No; I left it in the tent. But it can't be more than nine, I should say."

"Then it's not over. That gives us one more chance. But they won't let you in now. If I can hoist you in at a window, will you shout to the Resident? You can't pass the soldiers lining the room, and you're the first they'll turn against; but if you think it's worth while to give the warning, that's the only way."

"All right," said Mr Brooke, with his usual deliberation, and Arbuthnot led the way round to a side of the building where the windows, without the intervention of a verandah, looked out directly on the garden. Then he uttered a savage exclamation under his breath.

"Troops outside as well as in," he whispered. "Well, they're not looking this way. Oh, bother that band!"

A burst of music came from the hall, rolling, martial, solemn, but unfamiliar to the men who were listening.

"I know it. It's the Scythian National Anthem," whispered Mr Brooke, after a pause of astonishment.

"Then we are too late. Listen!"

The music ceased abruptly, interrupted by protesting voices. A single voice, trembling perceptibly, uttered some words inaudible to the listeners, and was succeeded by hoarse shouts, the clash of steel, and a woman's shriek, checked suddenly in its course.

"They have got at their swords—troops are covering them with their rifles—ladies are frightened and trying to be brave," breathed Arbuthnot.

"Let us get in. We must help them," said his cousin.

"Are you mad? What can two unarmed men do? I want you to help me to carry the news, besides. Of course they must make terms. They would simply be shot down—women and all. If they surrender, the Rajah must treat them well, for his own sake. Here, lie low!"

He pulled his cousin down among the bushes, just as a figure, magnificent in violet satin and gleaming

gems, tottered out upon a balcony directly above them, apparently seeking refuge from the tumult of angry voices in the banqueting-hall. It was the young Rajah, who had only succeeded a distant relative on the throne some ten months since. He was shaking from head to foot as he stood grasping convulsively the rail of the balcony. The soldiers below him averted their eyes respectfully, and presently a stout, bearded man in European dress followed him out.

"You have done it. You did it well," he said, "though I could wish you had followed my advice and waited for the toasts. It would have been more impressive."

"If I had waited, I could not have done it," broke from the boy. "They would have eaten of my bread—and the Resident Sahib has been very kind to me."

"Whose bread have they been eating since they came to your park here?" was the cynical reply. "But indeed you have done well, my cousin—if your condescension permits me to use the name. There are no Sahibs in Bala now—except yourself. Some European prisoners, that is all."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLAG IS HAULED DOWN.

"WELL, what now?" demanded Mr Brooke, when, following Arbuthnot's whispered directions, he had crawled back to the wood.

"Up the hill to the hospital again. You'll live on that road soon, won't you? Here, put on this *choga* of mine. Lucky I've got a complete disguise underneath, for any one would spot your shirt-front a mile away. What are we to do for a *pagri* for you? I see, we must sacrifice the edge of the *choga*, as you are shorter than I am. Then you'll pass muster except at close quarters. We'll lead the pony to the edge of the wood and turn him loose. He'll find his way back to camp."

Arbuthnot was hacking off a strip from the lower edge of the dressing-gown-like garment with his knife as he spoke, and twisting it dexterously into a turban about his cousin's head. Then, loosing the pony, he led the way through the wood, and on the further side gave the animal a cut with a switch which sent it off in the direction of the camp.

"Now for the stiffest walk you ever had in your life!" he said to Mr Brooke. "Better not talk till we get to the mountain, and anyhow, don't speak English."

"But where are we going?" asked Mr Brooke at last, when they had crossed the level ground, hiding in the bushes two or three times to escape the attention

of a passer-by, and were on the hill-path once more. "I thought it was too late to warn Ranjitgarh?"

"We can still take the news. I have a private path—my own invention—brings us out beyond the guards on the road—sets us well on the way to Gajnipur." Both men spoke in short gasps, as the pace at which they were climbing began to tell on them.

"Then you could have got off before I met you? I thought that Roman sternness was not quite genuine."

"I couldn't. I usually get to my path through the vaults under the Begum's house, and at sunset they are all locked up and the keys handed over to Gokal Das."

"Wonder you haven't had them copied before."

"So do I. As a matter of fact, the Begum is getting them done for me now, but not quite soon enough. I can't afford to give myself away to Gokal Das. He has probably laid up a nice little store for himself in some corner of the cellars, which is what makes him so angry when he sees me poking about there, but I'm glad he should think that's what I'm after. This affair with Scythia is a Hindu plot, undoubtedly, and I should be sorry for myself if Gokal Das guessed at my goings-on."

"Then is Gokal Das to be scragged to-night?"

"Talk about Roman sternness! No, he and all the Begum's household may sleep as peacefully as their consciences will let them. I can get down to my path from the ledge of rock below the hospital as well."

"But you can't get to that without crossing the place where those wretched hillmen are camped, and their dogs will give the alarm."

"I know they would. I shall get Miss Weston to let us lower ourselves from the hospital wall."

"But suppose it's discovered that she helped us to escape?"

"How could it be discovered?"

"Servants might talk, the hillmen might see you—anything. You would deliberately endanger two ladies

who have shown you the greatest kindness, and leave them to bear the consequences alone?"

"Oh, put it down to the usual cause, as Miss Weston does, and as my mother always did—the bad blood coming out! I look at it like this: two women—or British India?"

"Both," said Mr Brooke firmly. "So far as I am concerned, I can only tell you that if we escape to-night by means of the hospital wall, Miss Weston and Miss Wright must come too, and share our chance of safety."

"Are you mad?" demanded Arbuthnot fiercely, stopping and confronting his cousin. Then he laughed. "Well, do as you like. You won't insist on carrying them off against their will, I suppose? Short of that, you are welcome to make them the offer. I always have said you were a sentimentalist, you know."

"As well call me a philosophic Radical at once."

Arbuthnot gave a sort of chuckle. "Since this had to be, all I can say is that I'm jolly glad Cholmeley-Smith is in it!" he said.

The magic-lantern entertainment had taken place in the large ward, to the delirious joy of the patients, not wholly unmixed with terror in the case of those who had never seen it before, the children had been swept off to bed, the hospital had regained its usual aspect, and the nurses and probationers, in two parties, had enjoyed the unusual dissipation of a late supper and an English iced cake. Now, Janie was making her final round of the wards, and Eleanor was cleaning the lantern and putting the slides in order for their next appearance at Christmas. The sound of Saif-ud-din's voice parleying with some one at the gate reached her just as she dropped the last slide into its box.

"Another village case!" she said to herself in dismay, for the duty of organising festivities, in addition to her ordinary labours, had made the day very far from a holiday for her.

"It is Barūk Sahib and Ghulam Qadir, Barakat's

son, asking to have speech with the Bari Miss Sahiba," said Nani, whose thoughts had evidently flown in the same direction, appearing at the door.

"Oh, what a good thing! but what can they want?" said Eleanor, going out on the verandah, to see Mr Brooke, who had discarded his disguise, mounting the steps. Arbuthnot was helping the sleepy Saif-ud-din to bar the gate.

"I don't know how to apologise sufficiently for disturbing you so late," said Mr Brooke, deliberately as usual. "If I assure you that your professional services are not required, may the attendance of this good woman be dispensed with?"

The staring Nani was dismissed to bed, wondering anew at the eccentric ways of the ruling race, and to Eleanor's astonishment Mr Brooke turned towards the staircase which led to the roof.

"You have told me of the fine view you enjoy," he said, in a pleasant conversational tone. "Might I ask you to be so kind as to let me see it by night?"

For the moment Eleanor did not doubt that he had gone mad, but the fact that Arbuthnot was close behind gave her confidence, and she followed unhesitatingly. The ladies' house formed one side of the square enclosed by the walls of the compound, and the windows at the back, which were small and high up, looked down a sheer cliff. Hence, from Eleanor's watch-tower at the corner of the roof, she looked up the road on the left hand, and down it on the right. Mr Brooke looked neither up nor down. "The Scythians are in the Pass, and will be here tomorrow," he said, as soon as they reached the roof. "We want to take the news to Gajnipur, and warn Ranjitgarh. The road is guarded."

"The Scythians! how terrible!" was Eleanor's first ejaculation. Then she pulled herself together. "You think you can get down the cliff from here? But the hillmen will see you, even if they don't stop you."

"Not if you will allow us to lower ourselves from this roof to the ledge below. Have you a rope?"

"Here is the new well-rope, sahib," said Arbuthnot. "This slave knew that the Miss Sahiba had bought one lately, and he fetched it from the storehouse."

The calmness with which he had appropriated her property spoke volumes to Eleanor as to the gravity of the crisis, and she helped him to uncoil the rope, in which he was making knots.

"Shall I call Saif-ud-din to hold the rope?" she asked.

"No, we will keep the secret of the path to ourselves," said Arbuthnot. "We will pass the rope round the chimney-stack, and Barūk Sahib will hold it, while this slave descends alone. Surely, Miss Sahib, you have had the ledge cleared?"

Eleanor peered over the wall, and saw dimly that the brushwood which had hitherto fringed the cliff had vanished.

"The boys from the hillmen's camp must have cut it down for firewood while we were busy to-day," she said, with considerable annoyance. "But surely it will make your foothold safer?"

Arbuthnot grunted impatiently, and let himself down over the edge of the roof, slipping from knot to knot. Eleanor stood by Mr Brooke, who was holding the rope firmly.

"One can hardly believe that the Scythians are really here," she said. "What will it mean? Of course they will be driven back, but it is a dreadful prospect."

"It is," he agreed. Then, with even more than his usual formality, he added, "We hope that you and Miss Wright will do us the honour to allow us to escort you to Gajnipur."

"Now, to-night?" Eleanor could hardly believe her ears, and Mr Brooke realised that his proposal must sound, to say the least, quixotic. He repeated doggedly, "Now; at once."

"It's really most kind of you to think of it, but we couldn't possibly go," she said, recovering herself.

"We should only hinder you, and we can't leave the hospital."

"If necessary, my cousin could push on alone, while I travelled more slowly with you. Believe me, Bala will be no place for European ladies without male relations to protect them."

"But you couldn't take our girls and children, and they would be utterly forlorn without us. They are nearly all Granthis, as much strangers here as we are. If there is time, we might all go to Sheonath and place ourselves under the Resident's protection. Why, we might catch him before he leaves the camp, and travel with his escort. But there are patients who can't be moved——"

"If the Resident leaves the camp, it will be as a prisoner. The Rajah has turned traitor."

"Then we must simply stay here," said Eleanor bravely, though her heart sank. "After all, the Scythians are not savages. They will respect the Red Cross."

Mr Brooke was about to speak, but a renewed strain on the rope showed that Arbuthnot was ascending again, and it required all his efforts to keep it taut.

"Burree, what are you doing? Who is here?" cried Janie's voice from the top of the stairs, just as Arbuthnot pulled himself up over the edge of the wall.

"I had a climbing-pole hidden in a crevice down there," he said gruffly, "and it is gone. The hillmen, no doubt. We can't do anything without it."

"Burree, that hill-woman!" cried Janie. "Her temperature is up to 106°. Must you operate to-night, do you think?"

"106°!" said Eleanor, in dismay. "I will come at once. Do take anything that may be of use to you," she added to the two men. "I can't stay now."

She hurried away, and Arbuthnot looked at his cousin and laughed grimly. "I'm afraid you weren't very successful in rescuing your distressed ladies, were you? Neither British India nor their own safety

weighs with them against a dirty old hill-woman, you see. Well, we may as well go home quietly."

"But do you mean to say we can't go on?"

"Absolutely impossible. That pole took me days to make, and there are chasms and slopes quite impassable without it. We are cut off from Gajnipur until I can make another—with hooks and spikes complete."

"Then what can we do?"

"I imagine you had better return to camp and surrender yourself. I will guide you back, as Ghulam Qadir, and return here. The fate of John Arbuthnot, for whom you came to look, remains wrapped in mystery."

"But I should wish—— Why not stay here?"

"What! that you may be searched for, and the ladies get into trouble for concealing fugitives? Or if you are thinking of disguising yourself as a native, I tell you flatly I won't take the responsibility. It would ruin us both."

"I never thought of such a thing," said Mr Brooke, with dignity, as Arbuthnot unfastened the last knot in the rope and coiled it on his arm. They went down the stairs, and on the verandah intercepted Eleanor, who was rushing back to the house for something she had forgotten.

"Miss Sahib," said Arbuthnot, putting his hands together, "is it the will of the Presence that this humble one should conduct the sahib back to his camp, and return?"

"Oh, go by all means," said Eleanor hurriedly. "There is no need to come back."

Arbuthnot's voice took a wounded tone. "Has the Presence forgotten that she engaged this slave to help keep the door, on the recommendation of Saif-ud-din? She is his father and his mother, and what reason shall he give to the Begum Sahiba for so early a dismissal?"

"Oh, very well; come back, then," was the impatient answer, and with a hasty farewell to Mr Brooke, Eleanor hurried on. Ordinarily the keenest

of politicians and patriots, she was too deeply engrossed in the life-and-death struggle over the hill-chief's wife to have leisure even to remember the momentous news she had heard. She and Janie fought the disease until four in the morning, and when, worn out but triumphant, she threw herself on her bed for a few hours' sleep, she was conscious only of a dull impression of impending trouble, the nature of which her utter fatigue baffled all her efforts to recall. But however tired the Miss Sahibs might be, the routine of hospital work must go on, and before daylight in came Imam Bibi, the old ayah, with the Doctor Miss Sahiba's *chhoti haziri*, rattling the tray in an important and arousing manner.

"Ai, ai! there is heavy news, Miss Sahib-ji," she cried, as Eleanor opened her weary eyes. "The new doorkeeper, Barakat's son, tells strange things. Evil people are preparing evil deeds, as in the Year of Blood. The Rajah is false to his salt, and has made all the Sahibs prisoners. Barūk Sahib, the Miss Sahib's guest, was seized last night upon returning to his camp, and of Buttunt Sahib—upon whom be the blessing of God!—no trace can be found. Surely none would have the heart to slay him, and yet his valour is so great that he may have provoked death. But there is worse still to tell. An army of Scythians, in number like the blades of grass in the valley, is advancing down the Pass, sweeping all before it like the locusts. Does the Miss Sahib think that, as the bazar-people say, the day of the English is over?"

"Certainly not," said Eleanor decisively, as soon as the rush of words ceased. "Ghulam Qadir is a chatterer, and the bazar-people are liars. The day of the English will end when God wills, not before."

Dismissing Imam Bibi, she began to dress, thinking with asperity that Arbuthnot need not live up to his assumed character with such extreme faithfulness. But milder reflection told her that it would be no use to try and keep the coming of the Scythians a secret, and that free discussion might tend to rob it of its

terrors. On going into the verandah, however, she found that the news had produced an unexpected effect. Nurses, children, and women were hanging about in groups, some weeping, some talking eagerly, some with an unmistakable air of triumph. Eleanor's spirit rose.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "Joanna, why are the children not in school? Nurse Vashti, what are the probationers doing, idling here where they have no business to be?"

"The Scythians are coming, Miss—" replied Vashti, with more than a touch of insolence, but as Eleanor's eyes met hers, her unwilling lips formed the addition—"Miss Sahib."

Eleanor had lost her temper. "If Satan was coming, do you think I would let you neglect your work? Go, waste no more time," with a stamp of her foot. The habit of obedience prevailed, and the nurses fled, Vashti pursued by the words, "I will speak to you later, nurse." Eleanor heard them met by Janie at the door leading into the hospital, and turned her attention to the children, who were all in tears, owing to their firm persuasion that the Scythians were devils who lived on babies. After sending them off to their lessons with the promise that if she had time she would come and show them pictures of the strange country where the Scythians lived, she went down among the women, who were wailing in concert, with their *chadars* drawn tightly over their heads. Some of them had been rescued from famine, others had faced great persecution and been cast out by their families for embracing Christianity, and Eleanor's heart was wrung for them now that they saw, as it seemed, their sole earthly stay endangered. There was no attempt at mutiny here, the poor creatures were only too eager to grasp at any shred of comfort she could offer, and they found their greatest consolation in an argument she was almost ashamed to use: "If the Scythians come, who will be in the greatest danger—you or we?" One by one she prevailed

upon them to dry their tears, and when the bell rang for prayers they followed her to the verandah almost cheerfully.

After prayers Janie came from the hospital with an anxious face. "Burree," she said, "the relations of those two women from the village have come, and want to take them away, and Lakhshmi certainly ought not to be moved. They say that the Sheonath hospital was burnt down last night by a mob. I don't know if it's true. Of course Dr Weaver was with the Resident."

They looked at one another with eyes full of horror. "I'll come and speak to the women's husbands," said Eleanor. "It will certainly kill Lakhshmi if she is moved to-day—— Why!"

Something had whizzed past her and buried itself in the wall—a bullet. Several more followed, some knocking off pieces of plaster, others rebounding innocuously. With an involuntary and absolutely unreasoning impulse, Eleanor and Janie made a simultaneous dash for the stairs to see where the firing came from. Before they reached the roof, Arbuthnot was with them.

"What are you going to do?" gasped Eleanor.

"Haul down that flag. They think the place is a fort," he answered, and Eleanor saw that the Union Jack, forgotten the night before, was blowing out in the morning breeze.

"I won't have it hauled down. Let it alone!" she panted.

"Nonsense! Do you want the place knocked about your ears? Give me something white, Miss Wright—a towel or an apron or anything."

"No, no!" cried Eleanor in an agony, rummaging in the flag-locker. "The hospital flag if you like, but I will not have the white flag hoisted."

Arbuthnot snatched the Geneva Cross from her hand, and hoisted it only just in time, for a shot went through the Union Jack as he held it. They watched breathlessly while the Red Cross blew out in the wind,

and Arbuthnot gave a sigh of relief when no more bullets came.

"A close shave!" he said. "Better hide that Union Jack, Miss Weston."

"I shall bury it, as they did at Pretoria," said Eleanor, folding the flag up small and tying it round, "and put *Resurgam* on its tombstone."

"All right. Glad you can see it like that. By the bye, I'm afraid you are going to have trouble with Saif-ud-din. A large party of his relations was weeping over him just before the firing began, and it won't have made them any happier."

"Then we will make you doorkeeper, Ghulam Qadir," said Eleanor. Arbuthnot laughed shamefacedly.

"This slave has forgotten his place, and no mistake!" he said. "Will the Miss Sahibs be pleased to descend?"

In the courtyard was Saif-ud-din, looking considerably ashamed of himself. He asked for a day's leave, swearing volubly to be back by sunset, and asserting that his brother was very ill. The face of the brother peering round the gate rather spoiled the effect of the plea, but when this was pointed out to him Saif-ud-din merely wept and cast his turban at Eleanor's feet. He was a poor weakly old man, he said, and it was far better for the Miss Sahibs to have a strong and valiant youth to keep their gate. If Ghulam Qadir had not been available, he would have shed the last drop of his blood in their defence, but what good could he do now? The question was unanswerable, and he departed with his rejoicing relatives.

CHAPTER V.

MR BROOKE TO THE RESCUE.

"BURREE," said Janie, coming in about eleven o'clock, to find Eleanor writing up her case-book, "the Scythians are coming down the road. Shall we go up and watch them?"

"Go, if you like," said Eleanor; "I won't. I feel like Isaiah when the people of Jerusalem crowded to the walls to watch the Assyrians pass, instead of fighting them—'A day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity.' But you might keep the girls from doing anything foolish."

This permission Janie accepted, and watched with the probationers the force—which looked large to their unaccustomed eyes—of big men in sheepskin coats and fur caps, some mounted on shaggy ponies half-dead with exhaustion, others on weedy Bala horses, which had evidently been sent up to meet them. The girls looked on with a kind of awful excitement, now and then criticising in a frightened whisper the newcomers as compared with British or Bala troops, and Janie with a feeling that all the foundations of the earth were out of course. Anything might happen after this. Presently a shrill scream from one of the girls, and the immediate rush of all of them down the stairs, drew her attention to the path leading up to the hospital, and she turned rather pale, and followed them with resolute slowness.

"Burree," she said very quietly, meeting Eleanor

coming out armed with notebooks for her lecture to the nurses, "some of them are coming here."

Eleanor drew in her breath quickly. "Keep the girls in the wards, then, and try and get them not to scream. Oh, Janie! come with me to the gate, and if they won't listen to me, slip away and let out all the women and children by the side-door. Fasten the gate leading to the isolation ward to give them time. The hill-folk may give them shelter, or they may get to the village. The patients we can't hope to get out."

"I shall stay with them, of course," said Janie, in a voice that trembled but was very determined.

"*Chhoti*,¹ you are the comfort of my life," cried Eleanor impulsively, and Janie felt as if she had received the Victoria Cross. "We will try and make friends with them," Eleanor went on hurriedly—"give them tea and something to eat, perhaps. How many are there?"

"Only three. One looked like an officer, and the other two——"

"Oh, Janie!" Eleanor broke into a shaky laugh, "I thought it was a hundred at least. We ought surely to be able to keep three men in order. It's a comfort that they are sure to understand French, at any rate."

A delusive hope of finding time to take the Brussels M.D. degree in some future furlough, when the Christian public at home might be less exacting than heretofore in the matter of missionary meetings, had caused Eleanor to keep up her French, and Janie's school-days did not lie so far behind her but that she retained some recollection both of that language and German, so that they went to the gate with something of confidence. Arbuthnot, who was murmuring submissive phrases in Hindustani through the grating in response to loud shouts from outside, turned to meet them with a distinctly hostile glance.

"Is this humble one doorkeeper, Miss Sahib, or is he not?" he demanded, his words almost drowned

¹ Little one.

by a shower of vigorous blows from the stock of a heavy whip, which made the gate rattle on its crazy hinges. Various kicks shook it at the same moment from below.

"You cannot keep them out, Miss Sahib," urged Arbuthnot; "the gate will give way."

"Of course not. Open it at once," said Eleanor. He obeyed with obvious relief, but pushed her aside and stepped into the opening as the door swung back, thus receiving on his turban a blow from the whip, accompanied by a volley of what was no doubt abuse. Eleanor perceived with dismay that their visitor was merely a non-commissioned officer, who understood no language but his own, and could only make up for his ignorance by shouting. The sight of the two ladies served somewhat to modify his wrath against Arbuthnot, and he spoke with an attempt at civility, but still, unfortunately, without being intelligible. One or two German words were discernible in his explanation, such as *krank* and *Arzt*, and he enforced his meaning by gestures, which seemed to Eleanor and Janie to signify that they were to quit the place immediately, and leave it for the medical officers and wounded belonging to the expedition. They looked at one another in consternation, while the sergeant enlarged the scope of his gestures by flourishing his whip, the lash of which whizzed in unpleasant proximity to Eleanor's face. At last Arbuthnot stepped forward.

"Barūk Sahib understands the Scythian tongue," he said, with his hands together. "Is it the will of the Presence that this slave should seek him and entreat him to come hither?"

By a sudden flash of intuition Eleanor saw that he understood what the Scythian was saying, but did not venture to let his knowledge appear, and she consented helplessly. Here Janie came to the rescue with gestures, German phrases, and some Scythian words invented on the spur of the moment, and succeeded, or so it appeared, in making the sergeant

understand that there—down in that direction—was some one who spoke Scythian, and who would interpret if their servant—this man here—might be allowed to fetch him. The Scythian demurred at first, but the deadlock was so hopeless that at length he uncoiled his picketing-rope, and fastening one end of it to Arbuthnot's wrist, rode away with him and one follower, leaving the other on guard in the gateway. The evil day was at any rate postponed, and Eleanor and Janie drew a deep breath of relief as they turned back to the house.

"I do hope he isn't running into danger," said Eleanor, referring to Arbuthnot.

"I do hope he'll be back soon," said Janie. "It feels so much safer having him about."

At the verandah steps Miss D'Costa met them, whitey-brown with fear, and scarcely able to articulate in a trembling voice the suggestion that Miss Weston should have prayers over again. Eleanor considered the matter for a moment.

"No," she said, "we have already had prayers, and asked God to protect us in all dangers. Now we have our work to do. Tell the probationers to come in to lecture, Janie."

If Eleanor was able to turn her mind to ordinary work, it was quite clear that the probationers were not, for when they had trooped in and seated themselves in a scared and furtive way, they displayed an even more hopeless stupidity than usual. Much against her will Eleanor let them off with a shorter lesson, since so much time had been spent at the gate, and then she and Janie met again at lunch—a dreadful meal, at which it was necessary, for the honour of the British race, to endeavour to eat and talk as usual. It was a relief to begin to put in practice Eleanor's plan of kind treatment on the sentry, though they were not without horrible tremors lest they should be interfering with military discipline. They had already invited him by signs to stand in the shelter of the gateway instead of out in the sun, and now they

carried him out some food, which he accepted without compunction, and displayed no delicacy in asking for more. After that there was nothing to do but wait. As he was led off, Arbuthnot had said in Hindustani, "If I don't come back, ask the Begum for shelter in my name, and she will take you in," and dreadful pictures floated before Eleanor's eyes of what such a move would be. The helpless patients and their terrified friends, the frightened women and children of the compound, wailing, screaming, cowering, offering an irresistible temptation to any rough soldier to frighten them further—how could they be got safely up to the village, and how could bearers be obtained to convey those who could not walk? To begin to make preparations would merely mean a fresh panic, and Eleanor ventured only to put out her most valued medicines and instruments on the surgery table, ready for hasty packing if the need arose. It seemed as though hours had passed since lunch when a chorus of stifled shrieks and a second stampede from the roof announced that the watchers there had discerned the return of the intruders, and Eleanor and Janie went down to the gate.

"Oh, thank God!" burst from Eleanor's lips as she reached it, for riding beside the sergeant was Mr Brooke, cool and debonnaire as usual, while Arbuthnot, dusty from head to foot, walked at his stirrup. "What is it? What do they want?" she asked anxiously.

Mr Brooke dismounted before answering, in his usual leisurely way, "They had no idea that yours was a women's hospital, and they meant to requisition the wards for their sick. But I have seen the General, and put it right with him, for they don't want to alienate the Bala people by interfering with *pardah* women. All they ask now is that you should take in a young man of high rank, who came as a volunteer, and has suffered horribly from frostbite in the Pass. The surgeon gives me to understand that it is a case for immediate amputation."

"But one man is as bad as any number," said Eleanor in despair. "It's quite impossible."

"That is unfortunate," said Mr Brooke with gentle severity, "since I have taken the liberty of promising that you would receive him. It seemed to me that it would be quite worth your while, even if you had to put him up in your own part of the buildings. The surgeon will look after him, his soldier-servant will wait on him, and there will be a sentry on guard over his quarters who will protect you from molestation."

"Oh, we must manage it, certainly," said Eleanor. "We can move into the hospital block ourselves."

"But, Burree, the isolation ward!" cried Janie. "It has its own gate and everything, and all our people know that they must keep away from it."

"Capital!" said Mr Brooke. "Much better than turning out of your own quarters."

"I'll have it made comfortable for him at once," said Janie, looking to Eleanor for permission. "It's quite exciting, isn't it, Burree? Perhaps he's a Grand Duke."

"We needn't expect Grand Dukes to choose this route when there's an easier one," said Eleanor uncharitably. "You had better give him our sofa, Janie, and anything else that will make the ward look less bare. If you will tell the sergeant to come round to the little door in the wall, Mr Brooke, I will open it for him."

The sergeant was duly admitted, and the advantages of the isolation ward explained to him—with some difficulty, for his attitude of mind in the presence of hygienic devices was strongly anti-professional. He went off at last grumbling, and Mr Brooke and Eleanor turned back to the house.

"I suppose I ought to apologise," said Mr Brooke, "for inflicting this incubus upon you, but I really think——"

"Oh, it's far better than being turned out," said Eleanor quickly.

"I really think," he repeated, "that we could not

have devised a better plan. You will be left in peace, we may hope, long enough to——”

“Until we are rescued,” broke in Eleanor. The sudden relief after the strain of the morning had made it difficult for her to wait for the end of Mr Brooke’s sentences.

“Long enough for you to dismiss your present patients on their recovery, and perhaps to make arrangements for sending your native helpers to their homes,” he continued calmly. “You may then think it well to volunteer to take charge of some of the Scythian sick, but there will be plenty of time to decide that later.”

“But you talk as if the Scythians were established here for good!” she cried. “You don’t think England will calmly let them stay?”

“I think England will have enough to do elsewhere. Bala is not the Scythian objective—it is a mere side issue. Very probably no troops would have come this way at all but for George of Agpur’s treachery, and his influence over the mind of the Rajah. But the state offers a base for interference with the Shah Bagh railway, and its defection means a loss of prestige—hence the presence of our friends yonder;” he waved his hand in the direction of the Scythian force. “But we need not expect to be relieved until the war is over. What is a handful of Europeans and a rebellious native state up in a corner of the map compared with Granthistan—with India? They are at stake now, thanks to our criminal blindness and slackness. The Resident tells me that it has been well known at Simla for some weeks that Antar Khan had got the upper hand in Ethiopia, and that he was advancing on Kubbet-ul-Haj in triumph, attended by a small Scythian escort to protect him against any treachery from his brother’s partisans, while his cousin, young Fath-ud-din, was marching on Iskandarbagh, similarly escorted. If those ‘small escorts’ don’t turn out to be strong columns, with supports close at hand, and an advanced base at Rahat, I shall be very much

surprised. This would mean an advance both by Shah Bagh and Shalkot, and the long-expected war."

"And we can do nothing," said Eleanor.

"Nothing, I fear, except to bow to circumstances. But I would advise you to hold your ground up here as long as you can, rather than join our very unhappy throng at the prison-camp. You never saw such a set of discomfited men in your life—more savage than any bear I ever met. To be trapped so easily—it's enough to make a man feel sold."

"Yes, and so many of them young men who would want to be with their regiments. It is terrible. But is it true that the Sheonath hospital is destroyed?"

"I'm afraid so. There is always a strong anti-British party at Sheonath, you know, and last night they seem to have held high festival. Poor Weaver is madly anxious to get back to see after his patients and helpers, but they won't let him. The Rajah professes that he could not answer for our lives if we were in the city, so we are to be kept here."

"You mustn't expect me to be sorry for that," said Eleanor with a wan smile. "I never felt so helpless in my life. What a wonderful thing it is that you should be able to speak Scythian."

"Oh, languages are a hobby of mine. But my cousin knows it far better than I do."

"I thought so! But he would not confess it."

"I am sure he would not. Miss Weston, I don't want to set you against Arbuthnot, but I feel I must give you a warning. He is on a mission still, and he won't forget it. Don't let him endanger you in trying to fulfil it."

The events of the past two days had quite destroyed in Eleanor's mind the pleasing fiction by which she had been wont to account for Arbuthnot's visits to St Martin's, but this further suggestion roused her to anger.

"He may endanger me as much as he likes," she cried, "but he's not to endanger Sister Janie or our poor women. He shall not do it."

"I am glad to hear you say so, since he certainly could not endanger you without endangering them."

"Burree, it's all ready," cried Janie from the verandah of the isolation ward, as Eleanor laughed rather shamefacedly; "and the children say that the patient is being brought up to the gate."

"Send them back to Joanna," said Eleanor quickly. "Mr Brooke, you will come and interpret, won't you?"

It is to be presumed that Janie had no time to execute the request addressed to her, for when the four men carrying the patient had crossed the threshold, and the Scythian surgeon was greeting Eleanor with a magnificent bow, a piercing howl resounded from among the bushes, followed by Topsy's shrill tones, "O wretched Jinda, daughter of a foolish mother! Dost thou not see that he will now call for thee first?"

"What is it?" inquired the patient feebly in French.

"The children — they are frightened," replied Eleanor.

"Pray tell them that I shan't eat them," was the languid answer, and Mr Brooke sent the children flying with this singularly appropriate crumb of comfort. The bearers were dismissed, with the exception of one who was the patient's servant; and the surgeon, who proved to be of German descent and spoke both German and French, cast a glance round the two rooms of which the isolation building consisted.

"Good!" he said. "We will get to work at once. You, madame," to Eleanor, "will kindly act as my assistant and administer the anæsthetic. The sister is, of course, acquainted with her duties?"

It was a new experience to Eleanor and Janie to assist at an operation in their own hospital, at which the operator shouted at them in three languages if they failed to understand immediately what he wanted.

Their orderly minds were much exercised by his summary treatment of the case; but the need for haste was plain enough, and they promised themselves that the patient should receive special care afterwards. The surgeon smiled contemptuously at their artistic bandaging—excellent, as he phrased it, for candidates at an examination, but absurd in campaigning work,—but they could not help feeling gratified when he assured them that, with the exception of occasional visits, he should leave the patient in their care with entire confidence. Janie was to undertake the first night's watch, and the servant, Vanka, was to sleep on the floor in the next room in case she needed help, which it was to be hoped would not be the case, since he understood only his own language.

"I thought we were busy enough before," said Eleanor rather dolefully, as they watched the surgeon and Mr Brooke depart, "but this man seems to think we have nothing to do. If that hill-woman should have a relapse!"

"Oh, Vashti is a tower of strength," said Janie; "and I shan't bother you if I can help it. Unless anything very dreadful happens, I shall just send Vanka for Ghulam Qadir. He would be very useful in an emergency."

"Here he is now! Why have you left the gate, Ghulam Qadir?" demanded Eleanor, as Arbuthnot came up respectfully, followed by a stolid, overgrown Moslem youth.

"This slave has a petition to offer, Miss Sahib. When the Presence raised the head of this humble one to the height of power and authority by appointing him her doorkeeper, was it not said that he was to share the work of Saif-ud-din?"

"Certainly, but since Saif-ud-din has gone to visit his friends, you are chief doorkeeper."

"Let the Presence cast the eye of compassion upon this slave. Is it her wish that he should labour day and night, with time neither for sleep nor food?"

"Why, that's just what we want you for—to be here day and night," said Janie.

"Not without sleep or food," said Eleanor. "But Saif-ud-din never seemed to go short of either."

"This slave desires to ask daily how his mother fares," was the reply, given with just the right touch of sullenness. "She is old, and it is fitting he should visit her once in the day. Here is a youth, Abdul Husain, the son of a worthy father who is scribe to the Begum Sahiba, who desires the honour of serving the Presence when this humble one is at his mother's house."

"I can pay no more doorkeepers," said Eleanor impatiently, Mr Brooke's warning recurring to her mind. "Will he come for nothing?"

"This slave will provide him bread and water out of the bounty of the Presence," was the reply, "and the Presence will have two servants for the price of one. Should she desire the attendance of this slave, and he be absent, Abdul Husain will fasten the sandals of haste upon the feet of obedience, and fetch him hither without delay."

"Oh, very well," said Eleanor, and a specially low bow from Abdul Husain, salaaming in the background, ended the interview. Janie returned to her patient, and Eleanor went to the nurses' quarters and summoned Vashti.

"You understand what to do?" she asked, when she had explained to the girl that she was to take temporary charge of the hospital.

"Oh yes, I understand," was the sullen answer. "We-people are not good enough to nurse a European—even a Scythian."

"Vashti!" exclaimed Eleanor in consternation. Then she braced herself for the struggle. "Are you eating my bread, Vashti, or I yours?"

"Things are changed since yesterday," muttered Vashti. "The day of the English sahibs is over."

"Is it?" asked Eleanor. "Would your father say

so? Wasn't he one of the Christians whom Bishop Germaine saved at the risk of his life at Akhbarabad in the Mutiny? Some people said that the day of the English was over then, but they didn't find it so. At any rate, the day of the English is not over at St Martin's, and if you want things changed, you must go elsewhere. I don't want to keep you against your will. You are of age, and if you wish it, you shall have your wages and go at once. But if you stay, there must be no mistake. I won't have you stirring up the girls to rebellion. I am responsible for them to their parents, and here they must remain until they can be sent for. Will you go or stay?"

"Why should you be the head and we the tail?" demanded Vashti, plucking up her courage. "I was never a heathen, I am a Christian born, like you and Miss—the Sister Miss Sahib. I have been educated, I can speak English, I read English books, all the same as you. But I must obey you and her all my life, because I am a 'native'!"

"Because she has had a first-rate London training, and you haven't," returned Eleanor smartly. "Because she learned to obey with a good grace, and you never did. Oh, Vashti," her tone changed, "can you talk to me like this after all these years? When I offered to arrange a marriage for you, you refused. You said you wanted to be like the Miss Sahibs, and to stay with them. That was after the Sister Miss Sahib had nursed you day and night through the typhoid. You know that Dr Weaver Sahib said you owed your life to her over and over again. Have we ever treated you differently because you were not English? Do you think we don't love you all?"

"You take Nani's word against mine," grumbled Vashti, "and she is only a village woman and uneducated."

"But if she is in the right? I haven't time to argue it out with you, Vashti, but ask yourself if her Christianity may not be better than yours, even though she

was a heathen until ten years ago. And now, what will you do?"

"Since you are in this affliction, Miss Sahib, and with the hospital so full, I will stay," was the guarded reply. It was not wholly satisfactory, but Eleanor had never known Vashti to betray a trust, and she accepted it.

CHAPTER VI.

“WHAT CAN I DO FOR THEE, ENGLAND, MY ENGLAND?”

AFTER the strenuous night and day which saw the Scythian entry into Bala, there came a lull of a week. One or two anxious husbands of patients arrived at the hospital from distant villages, to reclaim their wives from the hands of the Miss Sahibs, but finding that the *pardah* character of the place stood in no danger of infringement, relented and left them. As it happened, Eleanor was not once called out at night, much to her relief, for she had a conviction, which she herself knew to be unreasonable, that her presence had power to avert any number of disasters which might happen if she were absent. The out-patients were beginning to return, though in small numbers, and ready to flee if the Scythian sentry before the isolation building so much as looked at them, and Vashti was keeping her compact loyally, and ruling the other nurses far more strictly than Janie had ever done. The Scythian patient—whose rightful designation of Lieutenant Count Evgueni Filaretovitch Krasinsky was shortened into Count Eugene for common use—was doing well, after two days and nights of great anxiety for Janie and Dr Schmidt, and the burly Vanka proved to be a simple-minded, willing fellow, who won the confidence of the children completely by carving wonderful things out of chips of wood, and placing them just beyond the sentry's beat for them to pick up. But for the frequent incursions of Dr Schmidt, who had a way of marching into the draw-

ing-room at all hours and demanding tea—he expected also cigarettes, but these were not forthcoming—and the daily visit of Mr Brooke, the routine at St Martin's was little changed. But Eleanor seldom visited her watch-tower, for to look down the road would be to catch a distant glimpse of the alien flags which waved over an enemy's camp and imprisoned Englishmen, and to look up towards Bala-tarin brought the reminder that the key to Central Asia was also a key to India.

The lull proved to be only the prelude to the gathering of another storm. As Eleanor made her round of the compound one morning, Arbuthnot asked to speak to her, and since no one was within hearing, allowed himself to use English.

"The Begum's got into awful trouble," he said. "She has always been such a pet of the Residents, that the state government have kept their eyes open for the chance of doing her a bad turn, and now they've got it. Two days ago they demanded from her something like forty years' arrears of land-tax, declaring that she had been assessed unduly lightly through the influence of the English. I wanted her to offer to pay by instalments, in the hope that things would be right again before she had lost much, but nothing would satisfy her but to defy the Rajah and vilify all his relations. Early this morning they sent troops to surround the house, and while I was parleying with them at the gate, some one—I believe it was Gokal Das—opened a side-door. They demanded of us all where the Begum's money was kept, and finally tied up Gokal Das and beat him. His howls were awful, and he confessed everything they asked him. I should say they made a clean sweep of whatever was in his charge, and they must have done well out of it. They ate and drank everything there was in the house, frightened the women out of their wits, and went away. Then out comes the Begum, who had stormed at them from behind the *pardah* without once stopping, declares that Gokal Das was in with them all along, and that

his beating was only a blind, and wouldn't have hurt a cat. Much against my will, she packs him off—for I would rather have him in the house and keep an eye on him than know that he's spying about outside—scolds all the women till they don't know whether they're standing on their heads or their heels, and collapses."

"She is ill? You want me to go to her?" asked Eleanor.

"Not ill in body, but outraged in mind. She declares that her house is disgraced and she won't stay in it—talks of camping on the hills."

"But that would kill her! Shall I ask her to come here?"

"If you only would! I believe she has a soft spot in her heart for you, because of your kindness to me."

With the mental reflection that the soft spot must be very deep down indeed, Eleanor summoned Abdul Husain to attend her, and mounted the hill to the Begum's house. Barakat, shaken and tearful, welcomed her at the door, and tremblingly deplored her mistress's obstinacy in refusing to listen to the prudent counsel of Ghulam Qadir, in whose young head were surely united the wisdom of Naushirwan and of Sulaiman son of Da'ud. The Begum had set her servants to get out the tents she had used when she made the pilgrimage to Kerbela thirty years before, and avowed her intention of avenging the desecration of her home by encamping before the Rajah's palace and there perishing of grief and exposure. The vengeance appeared to the European mind somewhat inadequate, but Eleanor knew that in Bala it would be considered to inflict the deepest disgrace on the Rajah, while maintaining the honour of the Begum's family by preserving her seclusion. Anxious to prevent further strife, she asked whether the Begum would receive her. Barakat confessed that her mistress was lying on her bed, moaning and muttering to herself, but she did not seem to think that a visit from the Doctor Miss Sahib would prove soothing. At last, however, she

consented to take Eleanor as far as the *pardah*, while she herself ascertained the Begum's pleasure. The result showed that the old lady's spirit was not weakened by her misfortunes.

"The Doctor Miss Sahiba!" came in strident tones from among the cushions. "Daughter of an evil mother, dost thou bring unbelievers to gaze upon the troubles of thy mistress? Bid her return to her house of bottles, and continue to show kindness to the enemies of her nation! Has she no poison for the Scythian dogs? Truly the day of the English is over—all their men are dead. I, who have eaten their salt for fifty years, remain faithful, for the sake of the great ones who are gone, but their own women are traitors, and therefore am I left to show my faithfulness by death."

"Begum Sahib," put in Eleanor through the curtain, "come to us. We will show you all honour, and you shall find that even in misfortune the English do not forget their friends."

"The unbelieving doctor woman asks me to come to her house!" screamed the voice, after a pause of amazement. "Bid her keep it for her enemies, and not insult the faithful."

"But surely it is better than the hillside?" pleaded Eleanor.

"Who spoke of the hillside? Praise be to God, the daughter of kings has still a roof and walls to call her own, and servants to do her bidding, though that pig Gokal Das be dividing with his fellow-swine the money that was in his charge! I will not stir."

"But are you safe?" Eleanor ventured. The Begum seemed to be struggling with wrath too extreme for utterance, and Barakat managed to put in,

"If Ghulam Qadir might come——"

"He shall certainly come if you want him," said Eleanor.

"He shall not come!" shrieked the Begum. "He has the spirit of the English, not of the kings his forefathers!"

"Oh, very well. I only wanted to help you, Begum Sahib. Why should I give up my servant if he would be no use to you?"

A burst of tears followed—produced, so Eleanor could not help thinking, to cover the Begum's double discomfiture at having betrayed herself and at the recollection of Arbuthnot's present position—but at length broken sentences became audible. The Begum was a poor miserable old woman, forsaken by her friends and oppressed by the wicked, and Ghulam Qadir had disgraced himself, but he was the only person she could trust. Finally, Eleanor gathered that it would be a real satisfaction to his great-grandmother if she would allow him to divide his time between the two houses, and sleep at the Begum's, and this she granted readily. As she returned to the hospital, however, a disagreeable thought struck her, which made her summon Arbuthnot to a second private conference.

"I believe you got me to invite the Begum here because you knew it would make her determined to stay in her own house!" she said to him sharply.

"Your invitation was given in all innocence, at any rate," he replied, adding, with the twinkle in his eye which always disarmed her, "If I had asked you to go for that special purpose, you wouldn't have done it, you know."

"And I suppose you put it into her head to ask that you should sleep there?"

"Surely you know that if I had, she would have banished me from her presence for months? You have to go by contraries with her, you see. No, you and Barakat have been kind enough to arrange the very thing I wanted without any prompting from me."

"I don't want any prompting from you," said Eleanor. "I hate all this underhand work in which you are constantly involving us. Why can't you be straightforward?"

"A difficult thing for a spy to be!" he said lightly.

"Then you are still doing that—that sort of thing?"

"Most certainly. Otherwise I should not be here. Come, I see I must confide in you, or you will manage somehow to give me away to the Scythians. But if the knowledge gets you into trouble, you must put me right with Brooke." Eleanor nodded. "Well, then, you know that there are rumours of a disaster going about?"

"A disaster? to us—to the English?"

"Yes; we generally begin with a disaster or two, you know. But the thing can hardly have happened yet, and we'll hope it may be only an unintelligent anticipation of events. We know what bazar rumour is. But there can't be much doubt that a battle of some sort will take place before very long somewhere near Shah Bagh. Presumably the Granthistan troops are being rushed up there now to meet a Scythian force advancing from Kubbet-ul-Haj through the Kunji Pass. Whether we win or lose, you know as well as I do that there is certain to be a great loss of white officers, of whom there are already far too few. Here in Bala are seventeen of them doing nothing, and mad to get back to their regiments, besides a dozen or so of unmarried civilians who are Volunteers. I mean to get those thirty odd men out of the Rajah's clutches, and start them down to Gajnipur."

"Well done!" said Eleanor, in spite of herself. "If you can do that I will forgive you. But I must say, Ghulam Qadir, that you are the most unsatisfactory doorkeeper I have ever had, and I had dreadful experiences before getting Saif-ud-din."

"Like his predecessor," said Arbuthnot gravely, "this slave lays the turban of contrition at the feet of forgiveness—and bolts."

Another cause for perturbation presented itself that afternoon, when Janie returned from the isolation ward with her fair face flushed, and her head held very high.

"Burree, I won't go into that ward if Count Eugene has his friends to see him!" she exclaimed. "That Pavel Arseniévitich is the worst. He pretends to be

so tremendously polite, and then he talks about me to the others, pretending to think I don't understand."

"I always thought it was a pity you took Count Eugene's tea to him yourself," said Eleanor. "Let Yusuf do it."

"I thought if Count Eugene scolded and threw things at him as he does at Vanka, it would rob poor old Yusuf of the little wits he possesses," said Janie, with a wry face. "But he can carry the tray and give it to Vanka. Oh, Burree, isn't it *horrid*? I didn't think there were such men, except in books. It makes me feel all shivery and creepy."

"It is monstrous," said Eleanor. "I suppose we can't exclude Count Eugene's friends from that part of the compound, but there is no need for you to stay there now, Janie. If you do the dressings and look in occasionally, that will be enough. Then you needn't even meet them. Besides, I will ask Mr Brooke if he doesn't think their visits might be kept to fixed hours."

"Oh, don't ask Mr Brooke!" cried Janie vehemently. "I'm tired of his name. You and I have always got on all right together without bothering about men, Burree. I'll do anything you tell me, but don't bring him in."

"Why, Janie! When he has been so kind!"

"I don't care! A little dried-up wretch of a man, dragging out his words li-like tha-a-at!"

"He doesn't drag out his words," said Eleanor indignantly. "I like his deliberation in answering. It shows that he always gives thought to what you ask him."

"Three weeks ago neither of us had ever seen him, and now we can't decide what to have for dinner without consulting him!" cried Janie.

"Three weeks? Nonsense! But I suppose it is only three weeks. But the King's Birthday and the day after, Janie! When a person has stood by you

through a time like that, you feel as if you had known him all your life."

"I don't. I feel that he is a horrid interfering creature, who has thrust himself in between you and me."

"Mr Brooke is my friend, Janie," said Eleanor, deeply wounded.

"You never wanted any friend but me before. But as soon as a man comes in, of course——"

"Janie, don't! How can you be so unkind? If you realised the comfort it has been to have Mr Brooke to appeal to——"

"That's just what I complain of. You never wanted any one to appeal to before."

"We were never in such trouble before, you know that."

"Oh, we should have managed somehow. But don't think I grudge you your friend. Only I know what it means."

"It doesn't mean anything but that he thinks we may need his help, and comes to offer it."

"And he doesn't like coming, and you don't like seeing him? Burree," tragically, "you can't deceive me. You know you watch for him all day till he comes!"

"Janie, you are horrid!" protested Eleanor, her face hidden by a convenient medical paper hastily opened.

"Why don't you say I oughtn't to think of such things when the country is in danger?" persisted the merciless Janie.

"I was just going to, but I knew you would say I was only trying to get out of answering you."

"Guilty conscience! You confess, then?"

"There is nothing to confess. Janie, why won't you see? I—I find his friendship such a pleasure that I have no wish—I am almost afraid—to think of anything further."

"Oh, Burree, what superstition!" Janie's good humour was fast returning. "But that will come later."

"I don't know. Oh, Janie, don't tease me." Eleanor's voice was almost inaudible. "It's rather terrible to be an elderly woman with—with the feelings of a girl."

"Oh, I am a brute, a beast!" cried Janie, rushing to her friend and drowning further words with a vigorous embrace. "I was jealous, and I didn't know it. I thought I was thinking of you, and I was only thinking of myself. Oh, don't cry! I'll say Mr Brooke is brisk and strenuous, if that will please you!"

Eleanor forced a smile, and Janie was forgiven, knowing that she did not deserve it. She was even more ashamed of herself the next day, when Count Eugene's friends, finding that she did not appear at tea-time in the isolation ward, invaded the drawing-room, with the ostensible purpose of paying their respects to Eleanor. These gilded youths had accompanied the expedition in the hope of seeing some fighting, they declared, but it appeared as though the object of their pilgrimage was rather what is euphemistically termed "life." Their views were Decadent, and their tastes, if their own account of them was to be trusted, gruesome in the extreme. Prince Pavel Bakhmatoff, the leader of the band, thought the surprise and massacre of the British agent at Bala-tarin and his escort—considered purely in the light of the artistic effect of blood against snow—an agreeable subject with which to entertain two English ladies. Eleanor's protests were literally talked down, and Janie was growing whiter and whiter, when Mr Brooke, who had come up as usual with Dr Schmidt, walked in, and the situation changed. Neither Eleanor nor Janie could make out how he did it, for there was about him an air of genial tolerance of the follies of youth that might have been expected to encourage Prince Pavel to proceed with his impressionist word-sketches, but the gusto faded out of the young man's tone, and the subject dropped. It was a little difficult to find

topics for conversation when the state of public affairs and the probable movements of the British and Scythian forces were all out of the question, but Mr Brooke led the talk skilfully to the natural features of Bala and the racing capacities of its ponies, and kept it there. When the Scythians were gone, he unbent for a moment from his attitude of urbane dignity.

“I scarcely expected to have to rescue a doctor and a nurse from the discussion of strictly professional matters,” he observed slowly.

“It wasn’t professional!” cried Janie. “Even Mr Cholmeley - Smith was better than these creatures. They like looking at blood because it is red, and dead bodies because of their distorted attitudes, and they call it artistic. There’s something so horribly unhealthy about them. I can’t think who Pavel Arseniévitsh reminds me of — oh, I know. He’s exactly like a Beardsley picture!”

The “Beardsley picture” was destined to meet Janie’s eyes fairly often, for Prince Pavel and his friends established a kind of siege of the hospital. Eleanor said severely that if Janie had not shown her horror of them so plainly they would not have cared to come, but she knew that her own dislike to them was equally responsible for the intrusion. There seemed to be nothing in the minds of these young men that was not elegantly corrupt, and they found a peculiar piquancy in displaying their culture and their corruption to the two Englishwomen. Mr Brooke, who was only allowed to leave the prison camp once a-day, and in company with Dr Schmidt, could not always time his arrival so happily as on the first occasion, and when Eleanor, goaded to desperation, told Prince Pavel that she could not receive him and his friends again, he had a weapon ready to his hand.

“I am sorry,” he said. “Hitherto my uncle, the General, has listened to my representations and allowed you to remain here, madame, in spite of the constant

assertions of the Hindus that this place is a hotbed of anti-Scythian intrigue. But if my friends and I are to be excluded, it becomes clear that they are right. In that case, we shall requisition all the buildings, and you and the pretty mutinous little Sister Janie will join your countrymen at the camp."

The heavy-lidded eyes held a menace as to the fate of the women and children on the compound which turned Eleanor sick, and she capitulated. Thus things went on until one dreadful day when a *feu de joie* was heard from the Scythian camp, and out-patients brought word that the foreign soldiers were all embracing one another and burning candles to the pictures of their gods. Presently Arbuthnot, calling Eleanor's attention to something as she passed him, slipped a tiny piece of paper into her hand, whispering, "From Brooke—brought by my old *shikari*. Burn it," and she took it into the surgery and opened it with dire forebodings.

"*Payab Bridge blown up. Granthistan troops cut off*," was what she read, and she realised that the Scythians had reason for their rejoicings. The great fortified bridge at Payab, one of the foremost feats of military engineering in the world, the link between Granthistan and the advanced post of Shah Bagh, gone, and a strong British force imprisoned on the wrong side of the river! They might fight their way back, might improvise some means of crossing, but she knew, as well as any soldier of them all, that they would now have to face not only the Scythians, who must have advanced by the Sarasgala Pass, as well as through the Kunji, but the frontier tribes—those assiduous adherents of the cult of the Jumping Cat. She showed Janie the message before she struck a match and burned it.

"And those—those fiends—will come and gloat!" cried Janie, ever alive to the actual. "What can we do?"

"Set our teeth and endure, I suppose," said Eleanor doggedly. "If we do begin with disasters, at least we

generally come out victorious. That's better than the other way about."

"I believe they've come already," cried Janie. "So early! Isn't it abominable of them? Oh, Burree, look! Mr Brooke was trying to get here and tell us first, and they won't let him."

Mr Brooke's small figure was almost hidden by the huge one of Prince Pavel as they crossed the courtyard together, the Scythian holding him firmly by the shoulder, while Dr Schmidt and another of the noble volunteers followed. "No, no!" the smoothly modulated words reached Eleanor and Janie in the drawing-room; "you will not soften the news, my friend, I will break it to the dear ladies myself."

"Beast!" muttered Janie viciously, as the visitors burst in like a cataract. Prince Pavel, releasing Mr Brooke, stood in the middle of the room and called for brandy in which to drink the Emperor's health—a loyal ceremony which he appeared to have performed several times already. The means were wanting on this occasion, however, and he condescended to inform his hostesses without further delay that the Granthistan troops had been cut to pieces to the last man, that the territory north of the river was entirely in Scythian hands, and that Scythian forces were pouring through all the passes to support the body now holding what had been the bridge-head at Payab. "And that is not all!" he concluded triumphantly. "India is in a blaze. The populace has risen everywhere against the English. It is another Mutiny, but far more deadly, because universal."

"The Viceroy has escaped from Simla!" put in his companion.

"Escaped!" said Eleanor contemptuously. "No doubt he has gone down to Calcutta to be at the heart of things."

"No, to be near his ships." "But that will be no good!" came from the two Scythians, but Dr Schmidt interrupted them imperiously.

"No, I tell this. It is my right; I claim it.

Ladies, the star of England has set for ever. Simultaneously with the appearance of our forces beyond the Kunji, the British Fleet——”

“Which British Fleet, if you please?” asked Mr Brooke, but his interposition passed unnoticed.

“——Was attacked off Gibraltar by the combined fleets of Hercynia and Neustria, and practically annihilated. Simultaneously again, a Hercynian force of great strength was transported across the North Sea, landed without difficulty on the shores of the Wash, and is marching on London. The only opposition offered was at Fenley, where the town and cathedral have been burnt.”

“Seems an extraordinary amount of simultaneity about it!” muttered Mr Brooke, but Eleanor had risen from her chair.

“Fenley? not Fenley?” she gasped.

“I may be wrong. It is the cathedral city between the Wash and London—not far from the Wash,” said Dr Schmidt politely.

“It is Fenley. Oh, England, England!” The cry rang in their ears as Eleanor broke through them and ran blindly out of the room. Janie turned upon the men.

“I hope you’re satisfied now!” she cried fiercely. “Miss Weston was born near Fenley, some of her people live there. And you come and boast to her that they are probably all killed. I hope your country and your Emperor are proud of you. They ought to be!”

But even Janie did not know the full strength of the blow that had broken down Eleanor’s self-control. She had never been told of the glorious summer evening—a landmark in the mental history of the silent, plodding girl who was believed to be unimaginative because she was reserved—when the view from a certain hill-top had burst upon Eleanor like a vision. Golden cornfields, green water-meadows, dark trees embowering historic houses, and in the distance shadowy hills and a glimpse of cathedral towers—from

that moment this had meant England to Eleanor. "This is England!" she had murmured — "'the precious stone set in the silver sea,' the England which 'never did and never shall Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,' the England which Alfred and Elizabeth made, for which Sidney and Wolfe and Nelson fought and died!" And now the army which forty years before had trodden Neustria under iron feet was marching along those white roads, leaving smoking ruins behind.

"I should like," said Mr Brooke with great politeness, "to know when you received this news, doctor. I heard nothing about it at the camp."

"It is not official—not like the news from Payab," replied Dr Schmidt reluctantly. "But it is a fact, none the less. The Emperor Sigismund pledged himself to this simultaneous action."

"I see—a *pucca bundobust*," commented Mr Brooke. "Well, considering that the Emperor Sigismund's support has a way of not materialising when it is expected, I think, Miss Wright, that you might inform Miss Weston that her friends are probably safe in their own homes, and Fenley Cathedral standing as firm as it has done for several centuries."

"Sir!" cried Dr Schmidt, bristling up; "do you impugn the good faith of the Hercynian Emperor?"

"Not at all—merely his powers. Things may be pretty bad with us, but I don't think he has had as much to do with it as he no doubt intended."

CHAPTER VII.

JANIE PLAYS THE HEROINE.

POSSIBLY as a punishment for his incredulity, Mr Brooke was not allowed to leave the camp the next day, but on the following afternoon he appeared as usual with Dr Schmidt, and while the doctor went straight to the hospital, made his way at once to Eleanor, whom he saw on the verandah.

"I hope what I said to Miss Wright the other day relieved your mind a little," he said. "It turns out now that I was quite right. For some reason or other, which the Scythians cannot fathom, the promised invasion has not come off, and Fenley is not destroyed."

"But the people all believe that London has been captured," said Eleanor, who had suffered many things at the tongues of many Asiatics during the past two days.

"Of course they do, and the Scythians will encourage them to go on doing it, as if things were not bad enough already. But I think there's no fear of that. I haven't a doubt that the other Powers—and possibly America as well—have united to keep Sigismund quiet, by threatening him with a general coalition against him if he interferes in our little affair with Scythia. In that way Neustria would safeguard herself, besides securing us a fair field. And we need it!"

"Then it is true about the Payab disaster?"

"True that the Granthistan troops are cut off—not

that they are cut to pieces, happily. No doubt our men will evacuate Shah Bagh and the frontier forts, and make for some possible crossing-place either above or below Payab. They will have to fight their way, and they will be hampered by non-combatants, but once across the river and on the railway they may be useful, whereas now they are merely locked up and surrounded. Then they may unite with the rest of the First Army and do something."

"They couldn't march down the right bank and meet the Second Army?"

"Through a hostile country?—and such a country! No, they must aim at getting back to the railway, and the sooner the better. Of course the Scythian reports are purposely exaggerated, but one can't doubt that something very like a Reign of Terror has set in all over India."

"Another Mutiny—as they said?"

"Well, attacks upon isolated Europeans, riots in the towns, faction fights between Hindus and Mohammedans, organised sedition in Bengal, another epidemic of murder in the Maratha Country—the sort of thing that is constantly happening sporadically on a small scale, but now it is appearing everywhere on a large one. It can be put down, of course, and will be; but the mischief is that the Police and Volunteers won't be sufficient, and troops who ought to be on the frontier must be kept back."

Eleanor shivered. "But they will send out reinforcements from home?" she said almost pleadingly.

"They should have sent them before. The drafts have been short for two years, you will remember. Oh, they will do what they can, no doubt, but the Scythians have pierced our first line, and there is a lot of way to make up. Every man that can possibly go will be wanted."

"Yes." She looked him straight in the face, and he spoke haltingly, not with his usual smooth deliberation.

"I am glad to have this chance of speaking to

you. I wanted to ask you—— You know Arbuthnot's scheme?"

"Yes, he has told me."

"He has not suggested it—— I suppose he thinks me too old, but—shall I go?"

The strength seemed to have left Eleanor's voice as she answered with difficulty, "You can ride and shoot—you are a dead shot; you know the country and the languages; you can command men. You must go."

"I thought you would say so, but I cannot bear to leave you here unprotected. If only you and Miss Wright were in question, we might well take you with us, but the native women and children——"

"I know,—it is quite impossible. Oh, if you could only save them and Janie, I should be perfectly happy!"

"But I should not," said Mr Brooke, with the ghost of a smile. "My dear," he laid his hand on hers, "consider everything before you tell me to go. If I live, I shall come back to you, you know that, but I dare not say there is much chance of it. And you, left here with all these helpless creatures to look after and provide for, and very possibly subjected to systematic persecution by the Scythians, what are you to do?"

"God sent you to us when we seemed absolutely helpless. Perhaps," with quivering lips, "I have looked too much to you. But God will help us in some other way. I dare not keep you back."

"Then this is good-bye," he said gently. Eleanor looked up with terror in her eyes. "No, I don't mean that we are starting at once," he added. "Arbuthnot keeps his own counsel, but I act as his intermediary with the other prisoners, and they are to be ready any night. And do you realise that this is the first time I have seen you alone since the invasion? Even if I know when the signal will come, I shall not be able to tell you. Nor would I tell you if I could, for it would certainly endanger

you. Now that you know nothing, you can tell nothing, but you have sent one volunteer to the front."

He laid his hand on her bowed head for a moment, and left her hastily, to meet Dr Schmidt, who was tramping up the verandah-steps, shouting directions to Janie over his shoulder. The surgeon was in a great hurry to get back to the camp, but his irritation was modified when he found Mr Brooke ready to start, and Eleanor was left undisturbed. Janie glanced in at her, and retreated noiselessly, the angry tears springing into her eyes. Why couldn't things happen nicely, and allow Burree a little happiness at last?

This sense of general unfairness gave an added sharpness to Janie's voice when she charged down the steps presently upon a child who had no business in the courtyard. It was the youngest orphan, the spoilt pet of the whole compound, upon whom his soldier father, in compliment to a revered commanding-officer, had bestowed the appalling name of Karnal Sahib. The boy, secure of his empire over her heart, looked up with composure into the angry face of the Sister Miss Sahib.

"No, Miss Sahib, I am not doing evil, but I was watching one who was. Miss Sahib, I think Ghulam Qadir is a *thief*!"

"Nonsense! You mustn't say such things," said Janie, leading him dexterously back to his own quarters.

"But I saw him go into the well-house, Miss Sahib, and bring out the rope—the new rope which has not been used, and take it away coiled on his arm. And I said, 'O Ghulam Qadir, what doest thou with the Miss Sahib's rope?' But he only said, 'The jackal asked the tiger what he was doing, and for answer had his skull smashed in,'—as if I was a baby, Miss Sahib!"

"I will speak to Ghulam Qadir," said Janie absently. "But if you are rude to the servants,

Karnal Sahib, they will certainly treat you as a baby," she added, waking to the moral exigencies of the moment.

Leaving Karnal Sahib in Joanna's care, she went up to the roof, and as she had expected, found the rope fastened round the chimney-stack, with the knotted end hanging over the wall. That Arbuthnot had left it there showed that he would not be long gone, and she sat down to wait for him. Walks for pleasure beyond the compound were out of the question now, owing to the insulting behaviour of the baser sort of the population towards their vanquished masters, which was not restrained with any particular zeal by the governing class, and the fresh air on the roof was welcome after much flying about between the hospital and the isolation ward. Presently the rope was drawn taut, there were mysterious rustling sounds out of sight, and Arbuthnot's turbaned head appeared above the wall.

"How you made me jump!" he said, when he had pulled himself over. "I wonder I didn't let go and fall down the precipice. One doesn't expect to find any one here at this hour."

"I only wanted to warn you," said Janie; "Karnal Sahib thinks your dealings with ropes very suspicious."

"Well, it won't be long now. Keep his mouth shut for a day or two, and you'll be rid of me."

"How are you going to manage it?" asked Janie eagerly.

"How exactly alike you and Miss Weston are—always wanting to know things that we try to keep from you for your own sakes! Well, you know there's a Scythian reinforcement expected?"

"Yes, because they have sent so many men down to guard the road against a surprise from Gajnipur."

Arbuthnot snorted contemptuously. "Gajnipur has quite enough to think about beyond the river, without bothering over Bala. Those Scythian detachments have gone down to operate along the railway."

"Train-wrecking?" asked Janie in horror. He nodded.

"Yes, there have been two or three nasty affairs already. Of course we can't guard that length of line, or sweep the hills for Scythian bands at present. But just now the Bala force is depleted, and the new arrivals won't be much good the first few days after they get here. But when they find so many of their prisoners have disappeared, they will have a tremendous hunt for two days and a night, say. While that is going on, I keep the birds safe in a cave down here, which communicates with the Begum's cellars. When the Scythians are tired out with patrolling the road and following up false trails, we start by my private path, cross the road at a place I know of, and make for Gajnipur from the south instead of the north, so avoiding the places where they will look for us."

"Oh, splendid!" cried Janie. "But won't Gokal Das tell them about the cave?"

"He doesn't know of it. If he even tried to get through the little passage that leads to it he'd stick. But it's my own discovery. I found the passage, all choked with rubbish, when I was poking about in the cellars."

"I see. And you will bring the prisoners through our compound and up here and let them down by the rope?"

"Good heavens, no! This isn't a state procession; it's a—a policy of scuttle. By the bye, who do you think insists on coming with us? Cholmeley-Smith, who I thought was quite happy lecturing by interpretation to the Scythians on the best way to avoid our mistakes! He's quartered with Brooke and two of our keenest Gunners, and somehow or other he's got hold of what's going on, and demands to be included. Why, I don't know, for he certainly won't fight. But I shall let our people in by the Begum's side-door, one or two at a time, with Barakat to keep watch for me. This rope is merely a back-way of my own, by which I can get to the cave quicker than by going up the

hill and loitering through the village with the proper amount of conversation."

"Then there is a path to it from here?"

"Well, a sort of sketch of a path. I have been making new climbing-poles, and all sorts of dodges for circumventing impossible corners, in the hours I have cribbed from Miss Weston's service. Oh, I say,"—he had been unfastening the knots in the rope as he talked, and paused now with it coiled in his hand,—“had you any idea that there was anything between Miss Weston and Brooke?"

"Anything?" said Janie, with intense scorn. "Everything!"

"Well, you know, she has told him to go with us. He gave me a nod when he passed me just now, which was to mean that he would go. I was astonished when he even suggested it. I thought he was comfortably settled here as interpreter and general caretaker to you both."

"Any one might know that if he gave Burree the choice she would tell him to go," said Janie, aggressively contemptuous.

"Rather rough on them both, I should say."

"Much worse for her. That's what the Empire means to a woman. To you it means a career, your life-work, perhaps a certain amount of reward. To a woman it means that when a little gold has come into her grey life, she gives it up with a cheerful face, and no one knows anything about it. Not that Burree's life here has been exactly grey," she added meditatively.

"Perhaps black and white would be more like it."

"Then you think she's a fool to do it?" He looked at her curiously.

"I don't!" with intense indignation. "It's perfectly right. Whatever Burree does is sure to be right."

"I wonder if you have any life of your own apart from your Burree? What would you do if you hadn't got her? She has turned you into a regular echo of her opinions."

"She hasn't! She is my Burree, and I think as she does because she thinks right. And I don't discuss Miss Weston with—" "servants," Janie was going to say, with cold dignity, but she altered it to—"with outsiders."

Two days later the whole neighbourhood was thrown into wild commotion by the news that some thirty of the British *détenus* had escaped from the prison-camp and could not be found. Even while Eleanor and Janie were at breakfast, a disturbance in the courtyard announced the arrival of a Scythian force, and they found themselves put under arrest on the verandah, while the servants were assembled and guarded by sentries at the gate. A thorough search was made, the walls being rapped for concealed chambers, and the floors methodically tested. No bush in the garden escaped scrutiny, and finally the hospital was surrounded by soldiers, while two old women from the village, barbers' wives, went from bed to bed, forcing each patient and her attendant relatives to unveil, and checking the list of nurses. Eleanor and Janie were able to state that they had last seen Mr Brooke on the previous afternoon, when he had said nothing of any intention to escape, and his manner had betrayed nothing unusual; and at last, after warning them severely against concealing any facts that might come to their knowledge, the Scythian officer withdrew his men. He took Arbuthnot with him, and marched up to the village, where the Begum's house had once more been invaded by a detachment of the state troops, guided—under compulsion, he declared—by Gokal Das himself. The strictest search failed here also in discovering any trace of the fugitives, and the Begum, whom Arbuthnot had taken into his confidence, excelled herself in the invectives she poured upon the disturbers of her peace.

The allied forces retired discomfited, and later in the day the news penetrated to the hospital that the services of a skilled native tracker had been requisitioned, and that though he had complained bitterly of being

called in so late, he had traced the escaped prisoners to a spot much lower down the road, where signs visible even to the untrained eye showed that a number of men had passed, leaving traces of English footgear. A force had therefore been despatched down the road, with instructions to search also all likely spots on either side. This news would have been more alarming than it was to Eleanor and Janie if they had not known that the tracker was Arbuthnot's old shikari, and if the old man himself had not visited the hospital that morning, ostensibly to ask for more medicine for his wife, but really to inquire with awful mystery how to get rid of a pair of European boots which would not burn. Arbuthnot's continued presence was also a guarantee that the fugitives were still safely quartered in the cave. When he disappeared, then it might be understood that the difficult and dangerous journey to Gajnipur by goat-tracks over the mountains had begun.

Prince Pavel and his companions did not present themselves at St Martin's that day, being presumably engaged in the pursuit of the fugitives, and the day after, when the pursuers began to return unsuccessful and angry, they were doubtless too tired, or not in sufficiently good spirits. Their absence compensated for a good deal in the way of anxiety, though the anxiety was now growing hourly less, and Janie was singing to herself as she hurried across the courtyard, when her attention was attracted by a colloquy between Abdul Husain and some one at the gate. Pausing to listen, she found that the visitor was Gokal Das, who had brought a copy of the Koran, which he said he had discovered in the possession of one of the soldiers who had searched the Begum's house, and which he had recognised as her property. He had bought it from the man for two rupees, and now wished to hand it over to Ghulam Qadir, as the Begum's representative, but on inquiring at her house he was told he was not there. It was therefore evident that he must be at the hospital, and Gokal Das was now demanding a personal interview with him, while Abdul Husain per-

sisted that he had not returned since he left the gate at noon.

The truth flashed upon Janie. Gokal Das was still suspicious, still inclined to believe that his supplanter had provided the fugitives with a temporary asylum, which a renewed search might bring to light. Any difficulty in finding Arbuthnot would give support to his conjectures. With a sudden impulse she plunged into the fray, in which words were now running high.

"Ghulam Qadir is certainly not here," she said, acknowledging the Hindu's perfunctory salutation. "Of course you will find him at the Begum Sahiba's house. He is no doubt putting the cellars to rights after the visit of the soldiers, and Barakat did not know where to find him."

"Then this wretched one must climb the hill again to seek him," grumbled Gokal Das, but Janie noticed that he set out with extreme alacrity. She noticed also that there was a small boy hanging about in front of the gateway, but rather to the left of it, so that he could keep an eye also on the side-door which admitted to the isolation building. His business, of course, was to track any messenger that might be sent out. Janie drew a deep breath. Everything now depended on her. Eleanor was lecturing to the probationers, and to call her would arouse suspicion. Moreover, Janie was not entirely averse from proving to the sceptical Arbuthnot that she could on occasion act on her own initiative. Glancing into the well-house, she saw the new rope coiled on its hook, and there she left it, with a well-founded distrust of her own capacity for climbing up and down by the help of knots alone. Arbuthnot might choose the roof as his means of egress, but she felt a strong preference for the surgery window, through which, small as it was, she believed she could just squeeze herself. It was the largest of the windows looking out at the back, and the shelves afforded a way of reaching it on the inner side. Once inside the room, with the door locked, the means for accomplishing her object were ready to her hand. A stout

six-inch bandage, of regulation length, was the most important, and for a few minutes she worked hard at this, doubling it, and tying deep loops in it about a foot apart.

"Now if I was in a book," she said to herself when she had finished, "this window would have a bar to fasten the rope to, but of course it hasn't. I wish the table was fixed, but these things will have to do."

She piled the table with all the heaviest articles in the room, having previously moved it near the window, and fastened the unlooped end of the bandage round two of the legs. Mounting to the window-sill by means of the shelves, she was relieved to find that the ledge outside looked appreciably nearer than it did from the roof, and she let down her rope courageously. It was very difficult indeed to squeeze through the window, and for a moment she really feared that, like King Charles at Carisbrooke, she would need the help of the enemy to rescue her, but at last she was kneeling on the outer sill, exulting in the thought that if she had been tall like Eleanor she could never have got through. Putting one foot in the first loop that she had made, she lowered herself cautiously from one to another, and at length stood proudly on the ledge, fastening the end of a narrow bandage to the loose piece of the broad one. But this first step, difficult as it had been, was far less alarming than those that must follow. Below her narrow foothold was the awful chasm, down which she must venture, at a spot where Arbuthnot's frequent journeys had left traces, though by no means a path. Unrolling the narrow bandage and fastening it round her, so as to leave both hands free, she began the descent, keeping her face resolutely turned to the cliff. Arbuthnot was a man of average height, and Janie, in these days of giantesses, a distinctly short woman, so that his footholds were almost beyond her reach. More than once she was reduced to grasping her rope and letting herself slide an inch or two, which felt like yards, and when at last she came

to a momentary standstill, it was merely on a projecting stone. But here, she could see, her course became horizontal instead of perpendicular, for there were rough pegs fixed in the rock—with the same lack of consideration for her height as before—to serve as a hand-rail. Before she had gone far with their help, her rope came to an end, and she was obliged to unfasten it and twist the last few inches round one of the pegs, going on without it. To her great relief, the passage did not last long, for she came upon a kind of path, leading diagonally up and down the cliff, which seemed at the moment a wide and safe road, though in cold blood she would have pronounced it impracticable for any one but an Alpine climber. The time already consumed seemed so terribly long that she hurried up the path without observing any precautions, and was only recalled to a sense of her danger when, as she trod on a loose rock at the outer edge, it gave way beneath her. She saved herself by catching at a bush, and for some seconds she crouched in sick horror, hearing the great stone plunging into the abyss below. It was the prospect of a different danger that restored to her the power of moving, for something came suddenly into view against the blue sky above her—a head, a turbaned head, the head of a man who was craning his neck to see over the cliff. She crouched motionless, her heart beating furiously, and at length the head was withdrawn; but when she moved on, she durst do little but crawl close to the cliff, avoiding the edge of the path not merely on account of the danger of falling, but that of attracting attention. She could almost have cried with joy when she found herself confronted by Arbuthnot, who appeared round a corner of the path with the menacing demand, "What do you want here?" in Hindustani. Half-sobbing, she poured out her news, thankful to be no longer responsible for it.

"Well, this settles it," he said. "Brooke must lead

the party to-night, and I must stay on for a day or two, if Gokal Das is going to be troublesome. I'll be off to the Begum's house at once. But how did you get here—down the cliff? Well, you are a brave woman, and no mistake! Brooke will help you back—he's as good a cragsman as I am. I'll call him."

"No, don't!" Janie managed to say. "I can do it. I think—a man saw me, by that far bush. He mustn't see—any of you."

"A man!" Arbuthnot frowned. "Look here, will you come with us? We'll take all the care of you we can."

"Oh no!" Janie screwed up a very creditable smile. "I should only hinder you. Perhaps he didn't see me. Good-bye."

Setting her teeth, she crept back, sustained by the thought that Mr Brooke was probably watching her round the corner, and would insist on coming to her help if she showed signs of failing. The pegs were reached only too soon, and when they were passed there was a dreadful moment when she had to balance herself on the projecting stone while she fastened the rope round her waist again. The climb she accomplished more easily than she had feared would be the case, by the help of her rope, and after all she had gone through it was child's play to mount to the window by means of the looped bandage. She squeezed herself into the surgery again, and half-climbed, half-dropped to the floor, to hear the door being shaken violently, and Eleanor's voice raised in alternate menace and entreaty.

"Janie, is it you? Do open the door. Children, open the door immediately! Don't touch a single thing. I shall punish you very severely— Oh, Janie!" as Janie staggered to the door and unlocked it, "what a fright you have given me! I thought the children had got in again and were poisoning themselves." This was in allusion to a terrible day when Topsy and Jinda had invited their fellows to feast on a bottle of calomel pills purloined from the surgery—

a feast which was only not fatal to its participants by reason of a sleepless night of unremitting labour on the part of the whole hospital staff.

"But, Janie!" gasped Eleanor, as she took in at once the disordered aspect of the room and of her friend; "what have you been doing?"

"Don't ask me; I can't tell you," cried Janie hysterically. "Only help me to put the room tidy. I won't tell you, Burree; it's no use asking me. You know nothing, and I shan't tell you anything."

"Janie! don't we always tell each other everything?" Eleanor's voice showed that she was deeply hurt, but Janie laughed nervously.

"Well, I am going to start a new system to-day, then. Don't be afraid; I haven't been doing anything wrong. But if you are questioned, you can say truthfully that you know nothing. Oh, I can't get these knots out!"

"Give them to me," said Eleanor. "And—won't you lie down a little, Janie? and put on a fresh cap presently? And your apron is torn."

"Oh, Burree, you think I have gone mad!" cried Janie, laughing in spite of herself, as at a new and brilliant idea. "Yes, I'll put myself tidy, and then you will see I am all right."

She went out, still laughing, passing in the doorway Vashti, who had come with some message from the hospital.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO AXES TO GRIND.

Two days after Janie's adventure, Gokal Das made his appearance in the Scythian camp, salaaming with extreme reverence to every person he encountered, but not stopping to exchange salutations. His goal was the tent of Prince Pavel Bakhmatoff, close to that of the General, and here the portly Hindu was evidently well known, for the sentry allowed him to pass without question. Prince Pavel, extended at his ease in a long chair, and beguiling his leisure with a scented cigarette and a delicately iniquitous volume, barely raised his heavy eyelids in greeting.

"I am tired of you," he said, in bad Hindustani, which must have been previously acquired in view of this expedition. "You have assured me once, twice, that you possessed information that would further my wishes, but nothing came of it. It would almost appear that you are trying to make a fool of me, my very worthy friend."

There was an edge in his voice which suggested that the consequences of such an attempt, even if it was unsuccessful, would not be pleasant, and Gokal Das prostrated himself promptly, touching the ground with his forehead.

"Truly this abject slave can say nothing," he lamented, "since his zeal for the service of the Presence has betrayed him into indiscretion. But not without a cause would he have intruded his wretched carcase into the dwelling of the heaven-descended.

He has fresh news, and this time it does not concern the baseborn unbeliever, Ghulam Qadir, but a dweller behind the curtain."

Prince Pavel closed his book, making a great parade of folding a cigarette-paper to keep the place, yawned once and again, then suddenly snapped out, "What have you discovered?"

The tone sent a thrill of alarm through Gokal Das, and it was in trembling accents that he replied, still from his lowly position on the ground—

"Passing through the village this morning, this humble one heard a dispute proceeding between a certain goatherd and his employer about a goat that was lost. The master declared that the man had stolen and killed it, but he swore with many oaths that it had escaped down the cliff on which the Miss Sahibs' hospital stands. Then all that heard him raised the voice of derision, crying that the goatherd had allowed it to fall over, and it lay dead at the foot, but he declared it was not so, since there were paths on the face of the cliff by which he had before known goats to climb up and down. 'Nay,' said he, 'the English know them also, for two days since, when I was seeking this very beast, I heard a noise and looked over the cliff, and there was a woman from the Miss Sahibs' house crouching on one of the goat-paths below me. I could not see who she was, but she wore a white head-dress fastened behind, and European clothes.'"

Gokal Das made an effective pause, noting his listener's attitude of quickened attention. Prince Pavel knew that only Janie and Vashti wore ordinary nursing uniform, the caps of the junior nurses being more like veils.

"And what do you imagine she was doing there?" he asked, as the Hindu remained silent.

"Nay, sahib, is it not clear that those wretched beings, the prisoners who escaped, were concealed close by, and the woman was conveying to them food, or a message?"

Prince Pavel jumped up. "You dare to tell me that

there are paths leading down the cliff, and hiding-places where the fellows may be concealed, and you have said nothing about it, so that no search has been made there?"

Half-dead with terror, Gokal Das needed the stimulus of a hearty kick in the ribs before he could be induced to answer. "Nay, sahib," he stammered at last, "this slave has always believed the cliff to be impossible of ascent. But the woman may have been making signals to men concealed further in the hills. Or it may be that the meddlesome fellow Ghulam Qadir, who is always prying where he ought not, has discovered a cave and hidden them in it."

"Ah, you don't mean your old enemy to escape, I see," said Prince Pavel, with something like good humour. "Now see here. I will give you a sergeant and fifteen men. Do you get ropes and ladders, and any men skilled in climbing that you know of, and examine the cliff where the goatherd saw the woman. Find out especially whether there is any secret passage by which she could have reached the spot from the hospital."

"It is an order, sahib. But she had abundant opportunity to slip out at the gate in the side-wall and in again, since the imp of a boy that this slave left on the watch forsook his post to play with another. But this humble one was not to blame!" Gokal Das ended in a crescendo of entreaty, as he gazed up at the Scythian who towered above him.

"I don't know about that. Why didn't you find out what this goatherd had seen, and bring me word before? Then we might have caught the rats in their hole, which we shall hardly do now. But go and examine the cliff, and bring me word instantly if you discover any practicable path, or the entrance to a cave. As to the woman, lay the hand of obedience upon the mouth of discretion. I will deal with her."

Gokal Das wriggled out, with innumerable promises of silence, and Prince Pavel sat down to consider his course. He had no intention of taking into his confi-

dence the fellow-volunteers who regarded him as their leader and model, and his uncle the General, for a man who had "lived" in his youth, had distressingly narrow views as to the distractions permissible for an officer in war-time. His ideal confidant would have been Prince George of Agpur, but that potentate, who had been the recipient of much attention from the invaders as "the first representative of the ancient ruling houses of Granthistan to welcome the liberators of their country," and was now practically the Rajah's right hand, was some two days' journey down the road, heading the search for the fugitives. Still, there was another kindred spirit available, in the person of Dhiyan Singh, a young relative of the Rajah, who had been appointed colonel of one of the regiments which had dispensed with the services of their British officers. Dhiyan Singh had marked for himself the post of commander-in-chief, but the army had flatly refused to accept a tyro in that character, and the army, from the part it had taken in the revolution, could make its voice heard with effect. The Rajah had promised his cousin that the delay in fulfilling his wishes should be merely temporary, and Prince George of Agpur had counselled a few weeks' assiduous study of military matters, but Dhiyan Singh had no intention of yielding to the requirements of these degenerate days, which demanded merit, or at least capacity, in the holder of high office. The good old times were come back, in which the representative of his branch of the family was inevitably titular commander-in-chief, and if he was kept out of his rightful post—why, he might choose to become Rajah. The question of professional studies remained in abeyance, therefore, and Colonel Dhiyan Singh flaunted a resplendent uniform of his own devising before the eyes of his imprisoned predecessor once a-day at least, filling up his time with pursuits even less military in character. To him, as possessed both of leisure and sympathy, Prince Pavel made up his mind to turn, though not entirely without misgiving, for he doubted whether Dhiyan Singh was

endowed with that delicate sense of honour so desirable between persons united in a nefarious undertaking. His regiment was engaged in guarding the prison-camp, and Prince Pavel rode down to his quarters, to receive a hearty welcome, for in spite of his new honours and unbounded opportunities of getting into mischief, Dhiyan Singh was feeling a little bored. The two knew each other well enough to make subterfuge unnecessary, and Prince Pavel plunged into his subject at once.

"I have a clue to the disappearance of the prisoners," he said. "Do you feel any interest in getting them back?"

"If it is not too much trouble," was the reply, as Dhiyan Singh glanced at his questioner with half-shut eyes. "I should be glad to have them back, you understand—very glad, but if they have been foolish enough to take to the mountains, I am not going up there to look for them. The tribes may or may not bring in the one or two who will be left after a fortnight or so."

"This will give you no trouble. I only want you to appear, with a tolerably imposing force, at the English hospital in an hour or two, and arrest the Sister—the woman your people call the Chhoti Miss Sahiba—on a charge of contriving the escape of the prisoners."

"I understand. And where are we to take her?"

"Ah, this is the important part of it. I shall appear and protest against your action, and use my influence with you to defer the arrest till to-morrow."

"But is it to be deferred?"

"Most certainly; but you will post a guard round the hospital."

"Well, you know your own business best," said Dhiyan Singh, with some contempt, "but why lose your opportunity?"

"I have my uncle to think of; he has developed prejudices," explained Prince Pavel glibly. "When she is arrested, you see, there must be an inquiry. The affair will be known."

"You are as bad as the English," grumbled Dhiyan Singh.

"Because I tell you that she could not disappear without a fuss? Listen, then. I stand her friend, I secure her one night more of freedom, but the arrest takes place to-morrow, for the Rajah upholds you. But when the lady is in prison, I find means to offer her a way of escape. She has confidence in me, for I have helped her already. She escapes, and disappears. It is her own doing, and not even the English could blame either you or me."

"I see," said Dhiyan Singh, and Prince Pavel read in his languid tones the resolution he had expected. The game he had outlined was one at which two could play, but he meant to be the first.

"You will arrive, then, in two hours from now?" he asked. Dhiyan Singh signified his assent, and Prince Pavel rode up to St Martin's to visit his sick friend.

Nearly two hours later, Vashti, passing through a passage at the back of the hospital building, felt her shoulder clutched in an iron grip. Turning angrily, she found herself confronted by the huge form of Prince Pavel.

"What is the Sahib doing here?" she demanded, with real courage, for the inherited tendency to cringe before the European was making her knees shake. "Does he not know that this place is *pardah*?"

"What were you doing down the cliff the day before yesterday, about this time?" he asked, without attempting to answer her.

"This feeble one down the cliff? I have never been there. No one can get down. There are no paths."

"Do you dare to lie to me?" He gave her a shake. "You were seen."

"The Sahib must be mad," said Vashti sullenly. "Am I a mountain sheep?"

"Do you know what we do with obstinate women in Scythia?" he asked her. "We whip them until they

confess. And that is what will be done to you if you persist in these lies. You know you went to carry food to the escaped English prisoners. You were seen, I tell you."

"If the Sahib is bent upon my death, he must kill me," was the despairing answer. "I know nothing of any prisoners, nor of the cliff." Very little was needed to make her break into the wild weeping of her countrywomen, and Prince Pavel saw that she was sufficiently frightened.

"Don't make a noise," he said, with another shake. "If it was not you, who was it? It was a woman dressed like you."

A light broke upon Vashti. "There is only the Sister Miss Sahib who wears clothes like mine," she said. "And I saw her, that afternoon, with her cap crushed and her apron torn, but she looked like—like a martyr," with a recollection of past studies in church history.

"Like a martyr?" The idea tickled Prince Pavel exceedingly. "At any rate, you have done your best to make her one. Now you may go, but say nothing of having seen me. If you do, there will be another martyr."

Vashti fled, and Prince Pavel turned back towards the isolation ward, just in time to escape Janie, who came hastily out of the hospital.

"Burree, is that you?" she called, hearing his retreating footsteps. "I want you to come and see that woman the police brought in yesterday. I don't like the look of her at all."

Receiving no answer, she hurried towards the house, and Prince Pavel, hearing a commotion at the gate, smiled happily to himself. "I fancy this will be the last thought you will give to that sick woman for some time, little Sister Janie!" he murmured.

Janie paused in astonishment on the verandah steps as Dhiyan Singh swaggered across the courtyard with much sword-clanking and spur-jingling, and Eleanor, hearing the measured tramp of his soldiers, came out

to see what was the matter. The moment he was face to face with the two ladies, Dhiyan Singh's manner changed.

"I come on an unpleasant errand," he said, with a manly reluctance very attractive to see. "The Miss Sahibs will not attribute to the unfortunate messenger the acts of his superiors? It is my duty to arrest the Sister Miss Sahiba on suspicion of being concerned in the escape of the English prisoners from the camp."

"But we have had nothing to do with it," gasped Eleanor. "How could we, up here? There must be some mistake. Won't you send a message to the Rajah, Sirdar Sahib, and see if you have not misunderstood him?"

"It is an order," replied Dhiyan Singh sorrowfully. "The Miss Sahibs are just. They understand the duty of a soldier, and will not make it harder for him than it is."

"But where is your warrant?" persisted Eleanor, with a vague idea of gaining time. Dhiyan Singh frowned.

"In Bala, in these days, the word of his Highness is done without a writing to back it," he said. "If it will comfort the Miss Sahibs to behold the exalted seal, I can send down to the camp for the order, but I could have wished to spare the Sister Miss Sahiba the ride in the dark."

"True; it is getting late," assented Eleanor mechanically. "Where are you going to take her?" she added, with a glimmer of hope—"to the prison-camp?"

"What! to help the rest of the prisoners to escape?" was the swift reply, and a laugh ran down the ranks of the soldiers, whose discipline had not improved since their change of masters. Dhiyan Singh directed an awful frown at them, then turned back to Eleanor and Janie with an expression of regretful firmness. "I can delay no longer, Miss Sahib. It may be his Highness's pleasure to examine the prisoner to-night, but in any case she must be placed in safe custody."

Eleanor and Janie looked at each other hopelessly.

"It's no good, Burree," said Janie, answering the depth of anguish in her friend's eyes; "I must go."

"The Sister Miss Sahiba speaks truly," said Dhiyan Singh. "And that the Doctor Miss Sahiba may credit the sincerity of this humble well-wisher, I will exceed my orders by allowing the prisoner to bring with her such things as she needs, and a servant-woman—not a European."

"We both thank you, Sirdar Sahib," said Janie gratefully. "Come, Burree, help me to get ready."

"What does all this mean?" cried a fresh voice, and Prince Pavel Bakhmatoff crossed the courtyard. "Why, Colonel, who would have expected to meet you here?"

"I am on duty," was the reply, given with obvious importance. "I am ordered to arrest the Sister Miss Sahiba, who is accused of having helped the prisoners to escape."

"Sister Janie? Nonsense! Some one has been making a fool of your durbar. This is preposterous."

"It is not for me to listen to abuse of my superiors, even from an ally," said Dhiyan Singh pompously.

"Of course not; but your order, as affecting a European, ought to have been countersigned by our General. Was it?"

"It is not necessary in matters affecting the public safety. I must do my duty, despite my personal regret."

"Well, look here. If I pledge myself that the prisoner shall be forthcoming in the morning, will you leave the arrest till then, while I see if the matter can't be cleared up? I know very well," added Prince Pavel pathetically, "that I am exposing myself to serious censure for this interference, but I would rather wreck my career than allow these ladies to be put to unnecessary inconvenience."

"Very well. The risk is yours," growled Dhiyan Singh, with a sulkiness which was not at all assumed, since his fellow-conspirator's highly chivalrous attitude had at once thrown his own efforts into the shade.

"After all, the matter is your affair more than mine." The meaning tone, and the expression of countenance which accompanied it, were deliberately adopted to catch the attention of Eleanor, and when her terrified eyes rested on him Dhiyan Singh felt a glow of satisfaction. He had at any rate put a spoke in Prince Pavel's wheel. That aspersed individual countered the blow adroitly.

"As Colonel Dhiyan Singh says, the affair is mine," he observed with smiling insolence. "An Asiatic has no concern in matters relating to Europeans. I follow you, Colonel."

He bowed the astonished Dhiyan Singh off the verandah, bowed again with deep respect to Eleanor and Janie, and followed his confederate to the gate, where Arbuthnot stood at attention. Prince Pavel was in a good humour, caused by a full consciousness of his effective exit.

"You are a smart fellow," he said. "Have you served?"

"In the Police, Sahib."

"I like the look of you. When we march, I will take you as my servant."

"This slave has eaten the salt of the Sarkar, and he now serves the Miss Sahibs," was the reply, respectful but dogged. Prince Pavel's anger flamed out.

"Understand that when I choose a servant I don't ask his leave, nor that of any one else. If I have to flog you every step of the way, you shall come." He emphasised the threat by a blow from his riding-whip, which Arbuthnot warded off with his arm. Dhiyan Singh, who was preparing to mount his horse, laughed sneeringly, and Prince Pavel remembered that he was scarcely likely to ingratiate himself with the ladies by assaulting their servant. With a muttered curse he passed on, to call the attention of his unsatisfactory ally to the necessity for posting sentries round the compound, and in other ways to patch up a temporary truce.

Eleanor and Janie, left to themselves, looked at one

another with incredulous eyes. The suddenness of the danger, and the unlooked-for method of deliverance, made the events of the last quarter of an hour seem like a dream. Eleanor recovered herself first.

"Well, there's no doubt how this interval is to be used," she said. "Let us have Ghulam Qadir here."

Abdul Husain was torn from his *hugqa*, protesting that it was not his turn to go on duty for an hour yet, and established at the gate, and Arbuthnot, leaving his shoes at the door, salaamed respectfully to his employers. Janie, the strain of the moment over, had dropped helplessly into a chair, but Eleanor was standing erect, with flushed cheeks.

"There is no one outside?" she said quickly. "Then you must start to-night, and take Miss Wright by your secret paths to catch up Mr Brooke's party."

Janie gazed at her aghast. "But I won't go, Burree!" she cried, finding her voice at last. Eleanor went on as if she had not spoken.

"Make what arrangements you like; you know better than I do what food you will want. Tell me when you ought to start, and what Miss Wright may take, and she shall be ready."

"Burree, I won't go! Do you think I would leave you all alone, to bear the blame of helping me to escape? I won't be treated as if I was a baby."

Arbuthnot looked at Eleanor as he answered.

"I agree with you that it is the only thing to be done," he said. "The neighbourhood is getting a little warm for me, too. I will see about the food. A hold-all and a good thick rug we can manage to carry—not more. I will bring Miss Wright a pair of grass sandals; they will be better than boots for the mountain-paths."

"You don't seem to understand," said Janie with great determination, "that I absolutely refuse to go."

"I am afraid you must," said Arbuthnot calmly. "Brooke and his party are not out of danger yet, and we have the future to think of as well. Miss Weston can tell nothing, for she knows no more than they

already suspect. You know that they are examining the face of the cliff at the spot where you were seen the other day?"

"But then they will find out everything," cried Janie. "If they get down to that path they must get to the cave."

"Oh no, they won't," was the dry reply. "Most fortunately, you mentioned to me that you had been seen, you know, and that gave me time to fake the place a little. There is no path now—for the moment—only a short ledge, tapering to nothing at each end. The pegs which helped you to reach it from here are gone, and so is the bamboo bridge which took one to the cave when that corner was passed. Indeed, there are palpable traces that you reached the ledge by climbing straight down the cliff—even a fragment of your apron caught on a jagged stone about half-way up. Of course, I found it somewhere else, but I took the liberty of transferring it to where it would be useful instead of dangerous. And therefore"—the voice had a tone of finality which forbade any further attempt at opposition—"you need not say that all is lost already, or that you might as well stay here. We will start as soon as possible after it is quite dark, Miss Weston. You know best how late Miss Wright usually appears in the wards. Everything must go on just as usual, for you can't be sure there is not a traitor somewhere. I should like to get as far as possible before morning, for there is a storm coming up, which will cover our traces. We are in luck, for the clouds will help us in leaving here. It would have been very dangerous to get down from the roof in bright moonlight, for they have sentries all round—except on the cliff-face," he added, catching Eleanor's look of consternation. "So please get ready at once." He salaamed again, and went out.

"Burree," said Janie fiercely, "I believe you think I would tell anything I was asked. I know he does."

"If believing that is the only thing that will make you go, you had better believe it," was Eleanor's

answer, given wearily. "Oh, Janie, you know I don't think anything of the kind. It isn't what you might tell, but the things they might do to make you tell, that I am afraid of."

"But I don't trust Prince Pavel at all," cried Janie eagerly. "I am sure he was only pretending to help us, and I would much sooner trust Dhiyan Singh. I never liked him so much before."

"That's exactly it. My dear child, those two are in league. It flashed upon me suddenly when Dhiyan Singh tried to give Prince Pavel away. He was trying to appear our friend, of course, but I am certain there must have been some compact between them before. You had better take my hold-all; it is newer than yours. I will bring it into your room."

"But, Burree,"—Janie held her back forcibly,— "listen to me one minute. How can you do without me? Think of the overwhelming amount of work we have found it for two of us. How could you get through it alone?"

"My dear Janie, I don't know. I only know you are going. I have always had a horror of the Scythians, but after this evening I wouldn't let you stay here if I had to do all the work of the place single-handed."

CHAPTER IX.

OUT INTO THE WORLD.

THE die was cast, and Janie, very miserable and extremely rebellious in mind, was meekly following Arbuthnot through unknown perils in the dark. They were roped together, and his hand was always ready to help her round a difficult corner, or to guide her feet to the right spot in a steep descent, but she was much too angry to talk to him. Whatever difficulties presented themselves, she set her teeth and obeyed her guide implicitly, too proud to show fear or shrinking to the man who had conspired with Burrree to make her do what she was determined not to do. It was the first time in her conscious recollection that such an outrage had been offered her—to be forced to yield without being allowed time to arrange her feelings and bring herself to a more or less willing compliance—and it made it all the worse that her attitude had been unquestionably high and heroic. Eleanor she could forgive—presently, but Arbuthnot's conduct was unpardonable. He pretended that nothing was wrong, giving his directions curtly, and making no attempt at apology, as if the difficulties of the path were the only things of any importance. He betrayed so little excitement, even at the most alarming points, that Janie was lulled into believing that their way was much less dangerous than it really was, but she could not withhold a grudging admiration from the absolute certainty with which he seemed to find his way in the dark. Moreover, though burdened with her hold-all,

strapped on his back like a knapsack, and a water-bottle and bag of food at his side, he was able to climb up and down the most hopeless places with the help of a bamboo a good deal taller than himself, with a hook at one end and a spike at the other, and foot-rests contrived at intervals in its length, which served alternately as an alpenstock, a hand-rail, and a ladder.

The storm still held off, though the thunder had been rolling among the mountains all night, and when the cloudy skies were pierced by sufficient light to make the surrounding objects gray instead of black, Arbuthnot paused upon a ledge rather wider than usual, and found Janie a seat on a large stone. She realised afterwards that she had sat with her back to the valley, and to the way they were going.

"How do you feel?" he asked. "Quite done?"

Pride stimulated Janie to answer airily, "Oh dear, no; I could go a good deal farther," and reaped its fit reward when Arbuthnot took her promptly at her word.

"I'm awfully glad of that," he said. "If you were quite tired out, I know of a hollow in the hill above here which would just shelter us, but it's not a good place really, and we might get flooded out if there's much rain. But if you can hold on for two hours more, we could get to a cave that might have been made for a hiding-place, where we should be perfectly safe both from rain and from anybody that might be looking for us. Think you can manage it?"

The tears were very near Janie's eyes, but she could not in honour recede from her position, and she nodded. He brought some native bread and dried apricots out of his bag.

"Just a little now, to help you along," he said. "When we get to the cave, we'll have supper, or breakfast, or whatever you like to call it. Have you a handkerchief?"

"Yes," answered Janie, in astonishment.

"Because I should prefer to blindfold you over this part of the way. It's not very nice looking down."

"But how can I walk if I can't see?"

He laughed. "How have you been walking all night? Do you know, I shouldn't care to show you by daylight some of the places you passed quite happily. I don't think I would even have brought you if it had been moonlight. But if you trusted me to get you through in the dark, do you think I shall be less careful in the light?"

"If I was very careful not to look down?" said Janie tremulously; "if I did exactly as you told me? It isn't that I don't trust you, but it's such a horrid idea——"

He pointed up the cliff. "It's either that makeshift shelter for the day, or going on blindfolded," he said; and Janie took out her handkerchief and gave it to him, knowing as she did so that if he tied it there would be no possibility of the bandage's slipping, or of her seeing over or under it. She had a miserable feeling of helplessness when they started again, and she devised a refined form of torture for herself by trying to determine from Arbuthnot's tone when the worst bits of road were at hand. Otherwise their progress was much as before—sometimes climbing up, sometimes sliding down, sometimes crawling along ledges or rounding impossible corners. The air became very oppressive as the storm grew nearer, and Janie, though she had nothing to carry, found her cloak intolerably heavy. She was wearing the hood over her head, instead of a hat, so that any one seeing her casually from a distance, or in the dusk, might take her for a native woman, and she durst not drop it, even when her hands were free to unfasten it. Presently she was glad to wrap it round her again, for heavy drops began to fall, and their last climb, which seemed to her to be up a perpendicular cliff, was in the face of pelting rain, while the thunder sounded close overhead. Arbuthnot hurried her across a kind of platform of rock, then under a shelter of some sort, for the rain seemed to have ceased to fall, though she could hear it outside, and

made her sit down on a piece of rock, while he took the bandage from her eyes.

"You have done well!" he said, and Janie glowed with pride at the commendation, so low had fatigue and alarm brought her. "I never should have thought a woman could hold out as you have done. Now let me wrap the rug round you while we have something to eat. I wish I dared make a fire to get you some tea, but you can never tell that there's not a goat-herd or some one on the watch across the valley."

He had some cold meat in his bag, as well as the fruit and *chapatis*, and Janie submitted to have her share made into rough sandwiches, which she was almost too tired to eat. It did not escape her that as Arbuthnot worked and talked, his eyes were perpetually searching the depths of the cave, and at last, rather frightened, she asked him what he was looking for.

"I was trying to make out whether Brooke and his party had been here," he answered at once; "and I should say it's pretty clear they haven't. That means that they spent their first day in the hollow I told you of, which must have been fairly close quarters for so many, and passed this place, without stopping, on the second night. It shows, as I hoped, that we are travelling faster than they are. You can imagine that when you have to get thirty fellows over the various bad places we have passed, it takes longer than with only two. And I'll offer you this handsome testimonial, Miss Wright. I'd rather guide you than Cholmeley-Smith, any day."

"Poor Mr Brooke!" said Janie. "Then when do you think we shall overtake them?"

"If the storm stops in time for us to go on to-night, and if you can keep up the pace, I should say we ought to come upon them before morning. I tell you why I expect it. Of course the crux of our journey is the crossing of the road. We have to keep along it for a mile or two, because there is absolutely no other path whatever—so far as I have been able to

discover—for that distance. After that we get on to our goat-tracks again, but on the opposite side of the road. Well, you know it's very seldom that the road is absolutely clear, especially just now, when they are patrolling it for our special benefit. Brooke and his lot were to lie up in a cave something like this until the proper moment came to get across. I calculate that it's about as certain as anything can be that they must waste one night in that way, and if we have anything like luck, they will waste two. They had two nights' start of us, but if we do the same distance in a night and a half, we ought to come on them in that cave well before dawn to-morrow. Then, when we go on, we'll rig up some sort of contrivance to carry you in, so that you won't have so much walking to do."

In her own mind Janie thought that she would prefer to trust to her own feet, if the paths farther on were anything like these, but she expressed suitable gratitude as well as overpowering drowsiness would allow her. Arbuthnot jumped up suddenly.

"You're tired to death," he said. "Let me take your rug and things into the back of the cave. Have you ever slept on the ground before? Just listen to the rain! I must say I'm glad we didn't decide on that very inferior cave two hours ago. But you'll hardly even hear the thunder in here, and this projecting rock will quite prevent your seeing the lightning." He struck a match, and went round the inner cave with it, that she might see there was no fear of snakes, then arranged her rug and hold-all for a bed behind the sheltering rock. "Now is there anything else I can do?"

"No, thank you. Thank you so much." But Arbuthnot had scarcely returned to the outer cave, where he was unrolling his *choga*, which he had carried with the rug, when Janie appeared again, apparently wide awake. "Oh, can we go back?" she cried.

He glanced out at the pouring rain. "How far?" he asked. "Have you dropped something?"

"Back to St Martin's."

"Certainly not," was the decisive answer. "Look here, I think you had better get to bed."

"But you don't know what a dreadful thing I have done!" cried Janie. "There was a sick woman brought in by the Rajah's police yesterday—no, the day before—they picked her up by the roadside. It seemed like pneumonia, but we couldn't be sure, and if the isolation ward had been available we should have put her there. As it was, she had to be in the large ward, and yesterday afternoon it seemed to me that she looked very like smallpox. I was just going to call Burree to come and look at her, and then all this happened, and I never remembered her again till now. And she will infect all the other patients, and perhaps some of them will die, and the hospital will get a bad name, and Burree will be worked to death——" She broke down hopelessly, and could scarcely bring out, "Oh, please let us go back at once."

"Impossible," said Arbuthnot. "In any case, the mischief is done now. All your nurses and people are vaccinated, of course? Then what good could you do by going back? Trust Miss Weston to find out what's the matter when she sees the patient. And it strikes me that you and Miss Weston too may be very thankful if it is smallpox. She might have got into trouble about your escaping, but the Scythians will think twice before they will either take her from an infected house or leave the disease to spread without her to cope with it. So go to sleep quietly, and make up your mind that it's all for the best."

Utterly crushed, Janie obeyed—outwardly, for she was inwardly persuaded that she should never sleep again. But extreme fatigue was victorious over not only remorse but a rocky couch and the warfare of the elements, and she slept until it was once more dark, and Arbuthnot's voice called to her.

"Oh, is it time? Ought we to be starting?" she asked, looking out hastily.

"No, unfortunately. I thought you ought to have something to eat, but after that you can go to sleep again. Listen! the rain is as bad as ever."

"But we shall waste a night," said Janie in consternation, after listening to the pitiless downpour.

"Of course, but then so will Brooke and his lot. They can't get on any more than we can, and the pursuit will have to be dropped too, so it's not as bad as it might have been. This is the last of the meat, I'm sorry to say. We shall have to keep body and soul together on *chapati* and apricots after this, till we come up with the rest."

Janie wondered how much *chapati* there was left, but she knew better than to ask inconvenient questions, and contented herself with seeing that Arbuthnot took his proper share of the food, which was divided by the light of a candle-end set well in the shelter of the rock. Of water, at any rate, there was no lack, for a small torrent was rushing across the platform outside the cave.

"I'm afraid this rain will mean floods in Bala—and just at harvest-time," said Janie.

"The worst thing for us will be if it washes away the road," said Arbuthnot. "A certain amount would have been useful, to prevent our being traced, but I don't like its going on so long."

"But could we be traced, in any case?"

"Hardly, unless there was a traitor in your camp. By the bye, how was it that you didn't remember that smallpox woman when you went round the wards last night? I thought you always made a final inspection last thing, and you were to do just as usual. Of course, if you didn't——"

"Oh, but it was because something dreadful happened," said Janie, her face clouding. "Burree and I were packing my things when Vashti came rushing in, and threw a handful of rupees on the floor, and cried out, 'Miss Sahib, I am Judas, and this is the price of blood!' We couldn't get her to tell us what had happened for quite a long time, but at last we made out

that Prince Pavel had left the money with Abdul Husain for her, saying that it was in discharge of a debt. It seems that he thought it was she who was seen on the cliff on Saturday, and in trying to make her admit it he frightened her so much that she confessed it was me."

Arbuthnot extinguished the candle-end carefully. "I thought as much," he said. "They went to the point with such deadly precision that it could scarcely be all bluff. But I hope Miss Weston restrained her indignation so far as not to fire the girl out that night."

"Fire her out?" said Janie. "Why, it was talking to her and trying to comfort her that made us so late. Burree said they would go round the wards when I was gone."

"You don't mean to say that the girl will be kept on?"

"Of course. You don't know how miserable she was. Burree thinks, and I think"—the addition was so unnecessary that Arbuthnot smothered a laugh—"that this trouble was just what Vashti needed. She had got rather proud and self-confident because she was so far above the others, and this fall may show her her own weakness. She might make it a stepping-stone to higher things, you see."

Arbuthnot considered the mixture of metaphors gravely. "I'm sure it is very heroic and forgiving of you both, and I hope the young person with the Biblical name will act accordingly," he said at last. "And what became of the reward of unrighteousness? I hope most fervently," as Janie hesitated rather guiltily, "that Miss Weston is not intending to throw it in Prince Pavel's face, or do anything else dramatic and foolish?"

"Oh no," said Janie, finding, apparently, some difficulty in answering. "The fact is—well, you know, we haven't had our salaries or the hospital money this month, and we have to pay the people and feed them just as usual. And food is much more expensive now

than it generally is, because the cook can't go to the bazar, and we have to buy just what the people choose to bring to the door."

"You mean you are actually short of money?"

"We often are, in ordinary times, but now we are very nearly destitute. Burree has had to give the people *chits* and a food allowance instead of their wages; and good Miss D'Costa brought out a little hoard she had saved up and insisted on lending it, but that was nearly gone. Vashti's rupees will keep us for a week."

"Well, this is one of the funniest ways of disposing of a bribe that I ever heard of. But is there no one in Bala who would advance you anything?"

"Poor Dr Weaver is our secretary, of course; but even if we were allowed to communicate with him, how could he send us any money? And we have nothing valuable enough to sell—except surgical instruments, and who would want to buy them?"

"I wish to goodness Miss Weston had spoken to me. I could have gone to Sheonath and got her an advance on a note of hand or bill of some sort."

"But who would have lent us anything?"

"Why, the soucars, of course—for a consideration."

"But they would think we should never be able to pay."

"Not they. They would be very glad to hedge, having put a considerable amount on the Scythians. You see, Miss Weston and you are quite convinced we shall win—aren't you?—and the soucars have a horrible fear that we may, so they would be quite ready to do business at treble the ordinary rates."

"I wish we had known!" sighed Janie. "But perhaps I shall be able to send Burree some money from Gajnipur."

"Why, how do you expect to get any?"

"I have brought a cheque," explained Janie with pride, "for the amount of her month's salary and mine. I shall send it all to her by the first possible

opportunity, and get something to do to support myself. Nurses are sure to be wanted."

"You seem to have planned it out most carefully," said Arbuthnot. "Certainly nurses and doctors will be in greater demand than any other Europeans—except soldiers, I'm afraid. But how do you expect to get your money up to Bala?"

Janie hesitated again. "Well, you see," she said, "I couldn't help thinking that as you were so anxious to keep your path a secret, you must mean to use it again."

"And so could act as your messenger? Quite so; but I don't mind telling you that what I hope to use that path for is to guide a British force along it when the time comes for clearing things up, to take the Scythians in Bala in the rear, and cut them off from Bala-tarin. But," hearing her gasp of disappointment, "don't be afraid. It's quite likely that I may have to go up again before that, in a different disguise, and then I'll do my best to revictual the fortress. But now, what do you think of getting some more rest, in case the rain stops before morning, and I see any chance of getting as far as Brooke's cave?"

"It seems so lazy to sleep all day and all night," lamented Janie, and ended her protest with an irrepressible yawn.

"Scarcely, when you had no rest last night, and very hard walking. You may be sure I'll call you if there's any hope of going on."

But the rain continued pitilessly all night, and when, in the small hours, Janie was rudely awakened, it was not by Arbuthnot's voice. A dull distant rumbling filled the air, and the ground seemed to rock.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried, terrified. "Did you hear it? Could it be guns—or an earthquake?"

"A landslip farther along the valley, I should say," replied Arbuthnot's voice from the doorway of the outer cave. "There's nothing to be seen from here. Don't be frightened. There are no overhanging rocks just near this place."

It was easy to say, "Don't be frightened," but less easy to accept the advice. For the first time Janie became conscious of the extreme hardness of her rocky couch, as she tried in vain to sleep, or woke from a momentary doze with a start of terror. Happily, no further shocks followed, and she fell at last into a troubled sleep which lasted till morning. The rain was still pouring down when she joined Arbuthnot in the outer cave, and she noticed that the proportion of fruit in the morning meal was larger, and that of bread smaller, than heretofore.

"Let us go on without minding the weather," she said courageously, when they had finished.

"I shall very likely go out and scout a bit, but I can't take you. Ladies have a perfect genius for getting drenched. It's their clothes, I suppose."

"I don't mind getting wet," indignantly.

"Oh, quite so; but if you will just imagine what a predicament I should be in if you got fever in our present circumstances, you'll see that it wouldn't do. Shall you mind being left alone?"

"Oh, not at all. I have some work," and a half-knitted jersey for Karnal Sahib made its appearance from the depths of the hold-all. Janie can hardly have intended it, but her tone expressed beyond all possibility of doubt the superiority of busy woman over idle man. She set to work with intense industry, and Arbuthnot, sitting hugging his knees in native fashion, watched her with half-shut eyes. He did not remember seeing her without a cap before, and he found himself thinking that it was a shame for girls whose hair had little curls in it to wear caps, however smart and businesslike and awe-inspiring they might look in them. Presently she looked up sharply, but he was not to be taken by surprise.

"I know I'm a worm," he said humbly. "I do feel it, I assure you. I should never have dreamt of bringing crochet, or any sort of sewing, on a journey like this. You and Miss Weston have the power, more than any women I ever met, of making one feel one

has no business to be alive. I suppose it's good for one, or you wouldn't do it. There can be no other earthly reason why you should try to blind yourself by working in this twilight."

"I can knit with my eyes shut," said Janie frigidly.

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Arbuthnot, and after a moment he rose and looked out into the rain. "Well, I think I'll go," he said. "At any rate, no one else will be about, and perhaps I can get to Brooke."

Pride kept Janie silent until he was actually lowering his climbing-pole over the edge of the platform. Then, much against her will, the words broke from her, "But what—what am I to do if—if you don't come back?"

"I really haven't the faintest idea," said Arbuthnot cheerfully. Then he relented. "I have every intention of coming back, and not leaving you marooned on the face of the cliff. As a guarantee of good faith, you may notice, I have left you all the food. If by any chance I should not come back, hold out here as long as you can, and I will bring or send help to you somehow."

And he departed, leaving Janie to a very long and lonely day. Her conscience told her that she had been ungrateful, and was not behaving as Burree would have expected of her, and her only bright moment was when, after hours of unremitting toil, she came to the end of her wool. She had not been so provident, after all, as she had wished Arbuthnot to think. Then, with a mischievous smile, she drew out the pins, and deliberately unravelled the jersey almost to the beginning.

"I can't lose that excellent moral effect," she said to herself, as she wound the wool into a ball again.

It struck her that the rain was growing a little less heavy towards evening, and Arbuthnot confirmed the supposition when he came in, tired, drenched and plastered with mud. He eyed the untempting food greedily.

"I'm afraid you have waited tea for me — so to speak," he said, wrapping himself in his *choga*. "If you don't mind, I'll eat before talking. It's been a long day."

Janie acquiesced at once, and sat down opposite him. She was almost as hungry as he was, for she had had no heart to eat earlier, and had also found that it is possible to tire of the simple life, as represented by a bread and fruit diet. Neither of them felt any inclination to quarrel with the fare now, but when Janie would have drawn the bag towards her to get out a fresh supply for him, Arbuthnot stopped her with a motion of his hand.

"It's a policy of economy and retrenchment now," he said.

"Why? Didn't you find Mr Brooke?"

"He and the rest left the cave the night before last — the night we started from St Martin's. I had told Brooke to leave a message for me, and there it was. I should have said it was practically impossible for them to find the road clear the first night they tried it, but that was their luck. Jolly bad luck for us!" he added.

"Then they crossed the road two nights ago? But they must have been stopped by the storm since, and you say we travel faster than they do, and you know the way? It only means that we shall catch them up in two nights, instead of in one, if the road is clear."

"The road doesn't exist," said Arbuthnot.

"What? Oh, that earthquake?"

"It was a landslip, as I thought. The road is gone for several miles beyond Brooke's cave. We may hope that they had plenty of time to get across, but we are cut off."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

FOR a moment the magnitude of the disaster kept Janie silent, then she rallied her forces bravely.

"Must we go back, then? I am quite ready to do it if you think it is right. Only let us have a few minutes at St Martin's before we give ourselves up."

An involuntary smile crossed Arbuthnot's face. "You won't see St Martin's again for some time if I can help it," he said. "No, I don't propose to give ourselves up—quite the contrary. Only, unfortunately, the worst part of our journey is still before us, and we thought it was over."

"Never mind. We have had a good rest," said Janie resolutely.

"You'll find it was needed. Well, if the rain stops, as it seems to be going to do, are you game for trying to get as far as Brooke's cave by morning?"

"Yes, certainly."

"I wouldn't take you there so soon if I could help it, for we have to go right down into the valley, and the mud is something awful. But the food question is pressing, you see, and I know that bit of path well enough to do it in the dark. From there I can hunt for some way of getting across the landslip."

"And getting to the road?" asked Janie.

"No, we must avoid the road now like poison. The Scythians are bound to bring down coolies from Bala and repair it as soon as possible, for the sake of their train-wrecking bands, who are cut off from their base.

They will have surveying-parties at both ends of the landslip as soon as the rain stops, we may be sure, and what we must try to do is to cut in between them, and get to our path, on the other side of where the road was, before they meet."

"Then you mustn't leave me behind while you scout, in case you have to waste time in coming back for me," said Janie.

"That's true. The first chance of a practicable path that I come across we must take. And now you had better get as much sleep as you can before we start."

It was a very muddy and wet and weary Janie that staggered into the cave near the landslip just before dawn. The mud added so immensely to the difficulty of walking that her first night's mountaineering experiences seemed like child's play in the retrospect. She fell asleep as soon as she lay down, without waiting for any food, and Arbuthnot hailed the opportunity of examining farther a spot which had struck him as hopeful on the previous day. Leaving the bag of food—sadly depleted now—near her, he stole out, and with the aid of the sun's first rays contemplated the under-cliff formed by the vast fall of rocks and earth. For some miles from this point the road had been blasted out in the face of the cliffs, passing under overhanging rocks, and now road and rocks lay together in confusion in the valley. The river which flowed there, already swollen by the rain into a torrent, had been dammed up by the fall, and its waters were now accumulating into a lake which must before long either sweep away the *débris* in its course or force a passage over it. Before this could happen, however, the water would in all probability reach the mouth of the cave—a fact which increased Arbuthnot's eagerness to escape from it. The mass of *débris* itself presented a steep slope, seamed in all directions with the courses of temporary torrents, which were the result of the rain that had fallen since the landslip, and were already running feebly. It was one of these that had seemed to him to offer a possible means of climbing the slope

diagonally, and as he looked at it from below it appeared to him that it was continued on the face of the perpendicular cliff above, where the water had first found a channel for itself in a fault or fissure of the rock. It was true that to reach the top of the cliff at this point would land him in an unknown country, where, as he had told Janie, he had no knowledge of the existence of any paths, but it would be hard, he thought to himself, if with necessity to spur him on, he could not find or make one. The greatest danger sprang from another cause—the fact that the diagonal path was only about a quarter of a mile from the Bala end of the landslip, so that, if the Scythian surveyors had any enterprise at all, they might be expected to penetrate sufficiently far to see figures ascending it. But at the moment Arbuthnot remembered this he noticed that as the rays of the sun became more powerful, a mist was gathering over the rain-soaked slope, and there was every appearance of the approach of one of the thick mountain-fogs, such as had often baffled and worried him in former expeditions, but which was now likely to be of the greatest advantage. Still, the mist might prove to be merely temporary, and in this case there was no time to lose.

With a determination which seemed absolute cruelty to its object, he hurried back to the cave and woke Janie, who found it hard to rise to the height of cheerful heroism she had attained the evening before. Arbuthnot made her eat some of the dried fruit, provided her with a fresh pair of grass sandals which he had with him—her own were so laden with earth that she could hardly lift her feet—and helped her to scrape off her skirt some of the half-dried mud that made it almost too heavy to walk in. Then, by dint of alternate scolding and encouragement, he got her out of the cave and to the foot of the under-cliff, and by this time the movement and fresh air had roused her sufficiently for her to understand what was to be done and its urgency. The stream had already ceased to run down the path they were to follow, but it was

very wet, and the foothold varied between slippery rock and soft moist earth. Arbuthnot called a halt several times that he might disencumber Janie of a little of the mud which accumulated persistently upon her, but he durst not allow her to rest, for they were now approaching what had been the level of the road. The fog was so thick that when they were climbing, the rope which held them together was the only sign to each of the other's presence, and when they ventured to speak, their low voices sounded ghastly and muffled. But the worst moment came when they had reached the top of the slope, and were pausing for a moment to take breath, with the scar which had shown to Arbuthnot where the road had been some twenty feet above their heads. From their left, the direction from which they had come, but on a level with their present position, came voices speaking in Scythian, and apparently close at hand.

"Hush! they're farther off than they sound," muttered Arbuthnot in answer to Janie's horrified exclamation, and she cowered in a hollow of the rock while he tried to make out what was being said. Not until, even to her anxious ears, it was clear that the voices were receding did he give up the attempt.

"They are trying to find out the extent of the damage before setting to work on the road," he said, "but they think exploring without ropes in a fog isn't good enough. That gives us time to make ourselves scarce. Shall we go on?"

There was nothing but rock underfoot now, and the climbing-pole was frequently in requisition. Once again Arbuthnot blessed the fog, since Janie could not see the gradually increasing depth beneath her as she hung like a fly on the cliff's face. He knew that her strength and spirit were being tasked to the utmost, but to allow her to stop and realise the full danger of the work in hand would only mean that she would remain paralysed where she was, unable either to finish the ascent or descend again to the slope. He hated himself for the things he said to spur her to fresh

efforts in that nightmare of a climb, but what was to be done? He meant to make up for his brutality by warm commendation when they reached the top at last, but Janie defeated his good intentions by fainting, for the first time in her life. It was not exactly a fainting-fit, rather a stupor born of exhaustion, and after the first horrible moment when he thought that she was dead, Arbuthnot decided not to try to revive her until he had found some sort of shelter. It had seemed to him in the morning that from one point of view he had caught a glimpse of a building of some kind—or at any rate, of something that was the handiwork of man—which he thought might be the remains of one of the huts erected when the road was made, to accommodate the coolies who built it. Marking his path at every few steps with the spike at the end of his climbing-pole, he walked about a hundred yards to the left, but finding himself still confronted by nothing but bare rocks, returned and walked the same distance to the right. Still unsuccessful, he tried to place himself in imagination in the position of the morning, and as a result, turned again to the left, but obliquely. This time he was rewarded by coming upon the hut he had seen, the only one still standing of several that had once been grouped here. This one had evidently been occupied very recently, for the roof was intact and there was an attempt at a door. Inside was a rude charpoy and some cooking-vessels, while in the cooking-place the charcoal was still smouldering, and—greatest prize of all—a pile of *chapatis* was ranged on a stone. Arbuthnot broke off a piece of one and tasted it.

“One or two days old,” he said. “That’s all right, then. It was the landslip frightened these people away—not plague. They must have thought the whole place was going, to have rushed out without even taking their food and pots. How soon will they be back to see what’s left? Not to-night, I trust—with this fog. If they should turn up, they’ll find visitors in possession.”

He groped back to where he had left Janie, and carried her to the hut without rousing her. She did not wake even when he tried to make her drink some tea which he had concocted in one of the cooking-pots, and at last he let her alone, and ate his solitary supper. Lying down at the door of the hut, where any intruder must of necessity disturb him, he fell into a sleep almost as deep as hers, which lasted until nearly noon the next day. The sun's rays were still obscured by the fog, or he must have waked earlier. There was no question of continuing the march, for Janie could only be roused with difficulty to take some food, and fell asleep again immediately, and moreover, Arbuthnot did not know what direction to take. There must be some path leading to this rocky plateau, by which the inhabitants of the hut were accustomed to reach it, and not very far to the right, certainly not more than a mile away, must be the secret track, running roughly parallel with the road, which Mr Brooke and his party were to take, but was there any way from one to the other? For the moment, however, the chief point was to find some means of leaving the plateau, which was practically a *cul-de-sac*, since to descend the cliff again was a feat hardly to be contemplated in cold blood. With rope and climbing-pole Arbuthnot left the hut, and spent the afternoon in exploring as well as he could without the aid of sight. He did not find what he had hoped for, a path leading to the right, but there was a kind of rude descent at right angles with the face of the cliff, and it was clear that this was the way they must take. He followed it a short distance, to make sure that it did lead to a path of some sort, and then returned to the hut, to find Janie awake and putting things tidy, much scandalised by his amateur housekeeping. She accepted his fiat that, fog or no fog, they must go on in the morning, meekly and without enthusiasm, and when the time came, made him angry by insisting on leaving a few pice she had in her pocket as payment for the *chapatis*. In vain he pointed out that a bear

might be supposed to have entered the hut and eaten the food, but scarcely to have left payment; she retorted that honesty was honesty, and she, as a missionary, was not going to steal poor people's bread without paying for it. In consequence of this dispute, a dignified silence reigned during the first part of the day's journey, in which Arbuthnot found philosophical comfort, when he thought of it, for if Janie had asked him where they were going, what could he have said? The fog still continued, and the path turned and twisted in the most perplexing way, though at length, to his great satisfaction, he discovered by the aid of his compass that it was taking a decided trend to the right.

That night was spent in a friendly cave which Arbuthnot thought he remembered visiting in one of his former journeys, and the fact gave him considerable encouragement, as showing that they must at last be approaching Mr Brooke's route. It was true that much valuable time had been unavoidably wasted, but once in the right path, Arbuthnot could not help hoping that the easier travelling, and the probability that the larger party had been detained by the fog, would render it possible to overtake them. Much sooner than he expected the next day, they came upon a well-trodden path leading inland from the river and the road, up the bed of a nullah. The fog made it impossible to distinguish landmarks, but he had felt certain that when they first struck the nullah it would be necessary to go down it for some distance before coming on the path, which left it and struck to the south-west at a point about two miles from the road. It was clear, however, that their devious course of the day before must have confused his reckoning, and brought him much nearer to the road than he had imagined, and he turned cheerfully to the left, promising Janie that a few minutes would bring them to the right path, and that when they had gone in the new direction for about an hour they would come to a most satisfactory cave, where there ought to be some

dry wood for a fire, "unless Brooke and his lot have used it all up."

But after an hour's walking the new path had not appeared, and still the marks of many feet led up the nullah. Could they have missed the place? Arbuthnot wondered; but if so, whose were the footprints? Could it be that Mr Brooke and his party had found the path blocked, possibly by another landslip, and had had to make their way round? This was a dreadful possibility, and Arbuthnot resolved to say nothing about it to Janie for the present. But evening was coming on, and some sort of shelter from the fog and darkness ought to be found. He was at his wits' end, when Janie pointed out a curious lightening of the gloom on the farther side of the nullah—rather a change in the colour of the fog than an appreciable relief from it.

"There must be a break there," she said. "Surely that would be the sunset?"

"I don't know. We could hardly see the sunset at that level from where we are standing. It might be a fire."

"Mr Brooke's?" cried Janie joyfully.

"We'll hope so. Yes, the path turns here. It's not my path, of course, but he may have found another. Shall we risk it? Will you wait here while I go forward and scout?"

"But who else would have a fire here? Oh, don't leave me; it would be so dreadful alone in the fog. Let me come."

At a loss what to do, Arbuthnot yielded, and helped her down into the torrent-bed—which seemed to have been often crossed just here—and up the other side, the faint glow in front of them becoming more pronounced as they advanced. They stood panting at the top of the steep ascent, and before they had found breath to utter a word, a hoarse voice challenged them, and Arbuthnot found a bayonet at his breast. With a presence of mind which Janie could never sufficiently admire, he answered in Hindustani, hurried, entreating, broken with terror, beseeching mercy. His

speech gave her a moment to collect herself, and she stopped him with a curt command in Hindustani, then addressed the sentry in English.

"Please take me to your officer. I am an English lady, and this is my servant. We have lost our way in the mountains."

The words were unintelligible, but the tone was not, though Arbuthnot averred afterwards that the sentry thought Janie was demanding to be allowed to pass on her way. Still keeping his bayonet pointed, the man jerked his left thumb over his shoulder, growled out a word or two which Janie interpreted as a command to proceed, and on their obeying, stepped nimbly behind them, evidently determined not to be attacked in the rear. Another sentry challenged them before they had gone far along the rocky path, and before long they were met by a guard headed by a non-commissioned officer. The guard surrounded them with fixed bayonets, and escorted them through a narrow passage in the rock, through which came the glow of the fire they had seen. There were several fires burning in the cup-like hollow they now entered, and the forms of men could be seen round them dimly in the fog. How large the place was, or what was the size of the force it accommodated, it was impossible to distinguish, but habitations of various kinds were visible—a few tents, and a number of huts sunk into the ground or built of loose stones piled together. Two or three officers met the prisoners and their guard, and an informal inquiry ensued, in the course of which the sentry from the brink of the nullah appeared to receive hearty commendation. Then one of the officers, evidently the captain, turned to Arbuthnot and put some questions to him in Scythian, only to be met by a torrent of eager, deprecating Hindustani. Once more Janie put him aside with a regal gesture.

"Monsieur," she said in French, "I don't know why my servant is to be terrified in this way. I am quite ready to answer any questions you wish to ask. It is true that necessity, rather than choice, has made

me your guest, but I can assure you one welcomes the sight of civilised people after a week in the mountains. Ah, how delightful to see a fire again! May I warm my hands?"

To her surprise the captain made a movement to stop her, but contented himself with walking beside her to the fire and watching her narrowly as she knelt down and stretched out her hands to the blaze. It did not strike her why the action should appear suspicious, and she chattered on.

"You will grant us shelter for to-night, monsieur? It is not much we ask—the smallest tent, a hut even. My servant is accustomed to sleeping out of doors, and I have learnt by this time to sleep on the ground. Then we will go on and not trouble you."

The captain seemed to be struggling with uncontrollable emotion. "But yes, mademoiselle; we will certainly grant you shelter for the night," he said.

"Thank you so much. And perhaps—something to eat?"

"Mademoiselle is starving!" said a younger officer reproachfully, "and we bring her here to watch our fellows at supper."

"If mademoiselle would honour us by becoming our guest?" suggested the captain, with a certain hint of irony that kept Janie's fears on the alert. But at least she had turned these men's attention from Arbuthnot to herself, which was the point of chief importance.

"With the greatest pleasure," she replied, rising promptly. "One does not fare luxuriously in the mountains, messieurs."

"Mademoiselle comes all the way from Gajnipur?" asked the captain, leading the way towards one of the tents.

"But no, monsieur—from Bala, on the contrary. I am attached to the mission hospital you see as you come down the road from Bala-tarin."

"Ah, where that *protégé* of the General's is being nursed—young what's-his-name?" growled the captain.

"Count Evgueni Filaretovitch Krasinsky," supplied

Janie unsuspectingly, and only then perceived that she had escaped a trap. The captain spoke more politely as he lifted the flap of the tent.

"This tent was prepared for—a distinguished personage—who has not yet arrived. Until he does, it is entirely at the service of mademoiselle. Supper will be ready in five minutes."

Even Arbuthnot was astonished by the change which Janie, impelled by the feeling that everything depended on her, contrived to effect in her outward appearance in that five minutes. The ever-useful hold-all provided her with a cap, collar, and cuffs, and a Red Cross brassard, together with an apron which concealed her muddy skirt, and she had discarded the unlovely sandals in favour of shoes. The captain and his subordinate welcomed her with enthusiasm, insisted on introducing a lowering youth with a hangdog expression who they told her was the surgeon, and escorted her at once to the mess-tent. They were the only officers left in the camp, they informed her.

"But how is this?" demanded the captain, as Arbuthnot followed them in. "Do your servants take their places at table with their employers, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Janie, with all the scandalised displeasure she could assume. "My servant was about to wait on me during the meal, as our custom is. But if you prefer it, I will dispense with his services."

"By no means, mademoiselle. I thought it might be a species of practical Christianity usual in the missions," said the captain, with perfect coolness, and Janie realised that she was by no means out of the wood yet. She took her seat on the camp-chair to which he handed her, the lieutenant being accommodated with a box instead, and Arbuthnot stood behind her as though to the manner born. For a time the officers vied with each other in keeping their guest's plate supplied, and then, without any warning, the captain inquired casually—

"And pray, mademoiselle, why did you leave Bala?"

Honesty was the only policy for Janie, but her heart

beat faster as she answered, trying to adopt the same tone. "You see, monsieur, I was suspected of helping some English prisoners to escape, and I was frightened."

The captain looked unfeignedly astonished. "And may one ask whether the suspicion was justified?" he inquired.

Janie considered the question before answering. "No, monsieur, I did not help them to escape," she said; "but I sent a message to warn them that I feared their plan was discovered."

"And that might have deterred them instead of assisting them?" smiled the captain. "I wonder you didn't demand a reward instead of punishment, mademoiselle."

"I don't expect either," said Janie, hoping her smile was as natural as his. "All I ask is to be allowed to pass."

"All? so little!" sighed the captain. "But in war-time a little may mean a great deal. I fear, mademoiselle, that in your hurry you may have come away without the formality of obtaining a pass?"

"Yes, I did," confessed Janie. "But I thought you had a way of letting non-combatants pass under a flag of truce, or something of that kind?"

The captain laughed outright. "But not without a pass, mademoiselle. And even if you had one, I regret to say we could not let you go on now that you have wandered here. For you see, mademoiselle, we are modest people, we here. We do not wish our location published abroad. In fact, we are here *incognito*."

"Oh!" said Janie, as innocently as she could. "Do you mean that I must stay here too, then?"

"Since it is impossible for the moment for you to return to Bala, mademoiselle, I am sorry to say you must. But rest assured that whatever we can do to lighten the tedium of camp-life for a lady of so much spirit and intrepidity shall be done. I am sure our worthy doctor will also be delighted to welcome the

advice of such an authority in the regulation of his hospital."

"Oh, I should be delighted if I could help in any way," said Janie, glancing at the doctor, who scowled. Thereafter she felt as if the sword of Damocles hung over her, and it was a relief when she was allowed to retire to her tent. A disagreeable surprise awaited her there, however, for her belongings had evidently been searched. She knew that there was nothing suspicious among them, but it was unpleasant to find that even Eleanor's photograph, which fitted into a little pocket in the cover of her Bible, had been rudely taken out and examined. Presently she heard Arbuthnot moving about at the door of the tent, and holding out her shoes, which had become mouldy in the cave, she spoke to him in Hindustani.

"I am ready to escape the moment you call me. I shall sleep in my sandals and everything."

Arbuthnot took the shoes, and grumbled, "They're posting a special sentry over the tent. I've been searched."

"So have my things. Did they find anything on you?" She took back one of the shoes, and indicated the worst patch of mould.

"There was nothing to find, but they took away my knife and revolver and compass. The climbing-pole, of course, they had already."

"But why is it? What do they think?"

"They think," said Arbuthnot, receiving the shoe again and examining it sceptically, "that you are a very clever spy carrying a secret message."

Janie was thunderstruck. "But I thought I had got on so well!" she said. He looked at her with great solemnity.

"It didn't occur to you that you were overdoing it just a little?" he said.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORDEAL.

A WEEK had passed, and Janie and Arbuthnot were still in the Scythian camp, with an atmosphere of smiling, unconcealed suspicion surrounding them. Janie had learnt to anticipate a trap in the simplest question, and she would wake at night in terror lest she had talked in her sleep, for fear the sentry outside the tent might understand English. The three officers all disclaimed any knowledge of "the beautiful language of mademoiselle," and the lieutenant whiled away an idle hour or two in entreating her to teach it him, but she never lost the conviction that they knew it well enough to profit by the slip if she should ever forget herself so far as to use it to Arbuthnot. Even Hindustani was not safe, unless there was no cover at hand for listeners, for two or three low-caste Hindus from Bala were always to be found hanging about and listening unblushingly to anything that passed between the captives. The strain of keeping up the pose of unconscious innocence so lightly assumed on the first night was very great, and Janie thought sometimes she must have gone mad had it not been for her work among the sick.

The objections entertained by the scowling surgeon to the arrival of a coadjutor became comprehensible as soon as Janie saw his—so-called—hospital. This was merely a larger hut than ordinary, dug out of the side of the hill, with a roof and front composed of odds and ends of wood and tent-cloth. Within were five

men who had been injured in an explosion—of dynamite intended for the railway, Janie shrewdly conjectured—and half a dozen others suffering from various maladies, ranging from a crushed thumb to rheumatic fever. There was no attempt at classification, and the treatment would have horrified a first-year student, while the drugs provided were so bad that Arbuthnot suggested the Scythian Government had bought up the medical stores condemned in the South African War.

A mingling of professional horror and pure sympathy made Janie concentrate all her forces on the surgeon. If she and her servant could get things into better order, might they count upon his support? He demurred, but finally yielded, when she had drawn a graphic picture of the result to the patients and his own future which his methods were bound to produce. Two tents were substituted for the hut, and the patients transferred to them, the doctor looking on sulkily enough, but lending his authority when the resentment of the victims and the orderlies threatened to express itself in something more than words. The dressings he left entirely to Janie and her pupil Arbuthnot, and to her surprise, on the second day he began to consult her privately about the treatment of some of the cases. Before the end of the week she knew for certain what she had soon suspected, that he was not a qualified doctor at all, but a medical student who, after repeated failures in his examinations, had been obliged to perform his military service in the ranks. Some cynic in authority, discovering his history, had hit upon the excellent plan of placing him upon the books of the detachment as surgeon, and pocketing the salary attached to the post. In the advantage of this little arrangement Janie suspected that the captain shared, while the object of it received as little as he would take to keep his mouth shut. It was apparently quite acceptable to the men, who much preferred huddling together in their dark close hut to the intruder's uncomfortable ideas about light and

sanitation and fresh air, and they even made a formal complaint to the captain, to which he responded by the smiling promise to shoot both prisoners if any man was shown to have died under their treatment. Arbuthnot was in the hospital when the answer was given, but he carried his assumed ignorance of Scythian so far as to say nothing about it to Janie, and she went on happily with her reforms. Padding splints, rolling bandages, and overhauling stores, took up much of her time, and in any idle moments she brought out Karnal Sahib's half-finished jersey, which was knitted and unravelled so often as to invite comparison with Penelope's web.

Eight days after the appearance of the two fugitives occurred another arrival of far greater importance, which was celebrated by a parade of all the effectives in camp. The men were drawn up facing the entrance to the hollow, and the distinguished visitor, who had been welcomed by the captain, was received with a salute. Janie, who had been watching with interest from her tent-door, flashed a glance of dismay at Arbuthnot when she saw him. It was Prince George of Agpur. He had been cut off alike from Bala and from the camp by the landslip, and it had taken him and his escort of Bala troops four days to make their way thus far over the *débris*. One piece of comfort his arrival supplied, and that was no small one. He had no prisoners with him, so that he had evidently not accomplished his purpose of intercepting Mr Brooke's party.

With dire misgivings that his appearance portended the return of Arbuthnot and herself—by no means in triumph—to Bala, Janie joined the company in the mess-tent as usual at supper-time. It was clear that Prince George had been apprised of her presence, for he came forward to meet her, and in the rich, rolling voice which she and Eleanor had always stigmatised as “unctuous,” expressed his pleasure in meeting her here, and his congratulations to the force that had so eminent an authority to organise its nursing-staff.

Having paid this tribute to politeness, he seemed to take no further interest in her, and joined, in bad French, and with much gesticulation, in the general conversation, but Janie felt herself again under the sword of Damocles. She could not be unconcerned, she could not breathe freely, and it was almost with relief that towards the end of the meal she heard the captain inquire very distinctly of his guest—

“Then you did not succeed in recapturing the escaped prisoners in whom mademoiselle takes such an interest, M. le Prince?”

“Alas, no!” replied Prince George. “They must have managed to slip past us—possibly during the storm. I learn that they reached Gajnipur six days ago. This is my authority. It was sent after me by a swift messenger from—my correspondent at a place I need not name.”

He took out a copy of the ‘Pathfinder,’ and Janie’s heart warmed at the sight of the familiar sheet. The captain and the lieutenant bent over it curiously.

“‘Pat’feendair’! What strange names these English journals have,” remarked the surgeon. “Will not M. le Prince translate?”

The other two removed their eyes from the paper with suspicious swiftness. “Ah, if the Prince would be so good!” said the captain, with great relief. “We should be all night trying to find out what it meant; but his accomplishments are so many——”

“But my French is so bad,” deprecated Prince George, with an engaging smile. “If mademoiselle would be so kind?”

The suggestion was received with applause, and Janie took the paper with mingled eagerness and reluctance. She was under no misapprehension; it would be useless to try to disguise any of the facts that might appear, for the Scythians knew them already. She began to read the column pointed out to her, turning it into such French as the turmoil of her mind would allow.

“‘A telegram from Gajnipur informs us of the safe

arrival at that place of a number of officers and civilians who were captured by the Scythians on their entry into Bala, but have now effected their escape under the leadership of a prominent retired official, who was shooting in the hills. From one of the members of his party, a well-known British politician, a representative of the "Pathfinder" has secured the following interesting details. The success of the enterprise was due to the ingenuity of one of the captives, who contrived to disguise himself as a Mission *employé*' "——

Janie's heart was beating so loudly as she read that she did not at first hear the suave inquiry of the captain, "This servant of yours here was in the employ of the Mission, mademoiselle, I presume?" and he was obliged to repeat it.

"Oh, he was in our service when you entered the country," she answered bravely, and set herself again to her task, wondering what further pitfalls Mr Cholmeley-Smith had been preparing for her and for the man who stood rigid behind her chair. "Let me see, where was I?—'a Mission *employé*, and after appointing a rendezvous in a commodious cavern, guided the fugitives by—by secret paths through the mountains. Unfortunately'"—Janie hesitated and almost broke down, but forced herself with a great effort to go on—"Unfortunately suspicion fell on this gallant fellow, and he was unable to accompany the party——'"

"And he is here now, is he not, mademoiselle?" asked the captain smoothly. "Lieutenant, arrest that man."

Before Janie could rise from her chair, the lieutenant's hand was on Arbuthnot's shoulder. She could scarcely believe her ears when she heard the stammering, astonished protest in Hindustani. Could he keep it up still?

"Miss Sahib, what do they say? What has this slave done?" he asked her pitifully, and her courage came back.

"Monsieur, are you not making some mistake? You alarm my poor follower. If you wish to ask him any

questions, let me interpret—or let the Prince do it, if you do not trust me.”

“On the contrary, mademoiselle, I will ask you the questions, if you please. How did you leave Bala?”

“By—by— On foot, monsieur.”

“Doubtless, mademoiselle. But by what road?”

“I—I cannot tell you.”

“Was it by the government road? Scarcely, in view of what the Prince tells me of his system of patrols. What road, then, did you take?”

“I have nothing to tell you, monsieur.”

“Did you or your servant act as guide?”

Janie hesitated, speechless, and Prince George interposed.

“Permit me, my dear captain. This questioning is hardly fair to mademoiselle.” He turned upon Arbuthnot, and spoke in Hindustani, “Boy, did you guide your mistress here from Bala?”

“Without doubt, Sahib. It was an order from the Bari Miss Sahiba.”

“And by what path did you bring her?”

“It is not for this slave to say, Sahib.”

“But I say he must,” thundered Prince George, suddenly transformed. “Are my efforts on behalf of his Highness and his allies to be frustrated? I will know the secret of that path, if I have to tear it out of you.”

Arbuthnot looked him straight in the face without answering, and Prince George, allowing his anger to subside, turned to the Scythians.

“The man is a Sahib—an Englishman,” he corrected himself hastily. “I am sure of it—and I have seen him somewhere, but I cannot remember where.”

“An Englishman—a spy?” cried the captain, but Prince George laid a hand upon his sleeve.

“Compose yourself, captain. As you say, if an Englishman, then a spy. But of what use would he be to us dead? He asserts that he is a native, and with natives there are other ways—is it not so?”

"True, M. le Prince, and they shall be tried. Call up the guard," to his orderly, "and fetch me a whip."

"A riding-whip, excellency?"

"A riding-whip! No, a *nagaika*."

There was an awful moment of expectation. Janie, clinging to the back of her chair for support, tried to speak, but was silenced as much by a stern glance from Arbuthnot as by the hard faces of the rest. The captain was still smiling, and Prince George's eyes looked wolfish. The guard came. Arbuthnot turned on her another glance, which said "I forbid you to speak," as plainly as words could have done, and an agonised sob broke from her as he was led out.

"Oh, don't be afraid, mademoiselle. We have not forgotten you," said the captain genially. "Bring her, lieutenant—and hold her hands."

Gripped on either side by the lieutenant and the doctor, without whose support she must have fallen, Janie was hurried out, to find a ring of eager soldiers gathering round the group. Arbuthnot was fastened by the wrists to one of the supports of the tent. His jacket had been flung aside, and his shirt was torn open down the back.

"Bring out the lamp," said the captain to the orderly. "M. le Prince, will you be good enough to explain to this obstinate heathen that I will cut the flesh off his bones unless he answer your questions?"

Prince George complied, adding much realistic detail, but the prisoner remained resolutely silent. The captain made a sign to a stalwart soldier, and for a time there was no sound to be heard but the thud of the blows and Janie's choking sobs.

"I think the fellow imagines we are playing with him," said the captain at last, with much disgust. "Yégor, give the whip to Sascha. Now perhaps we shall do some good."

Sascha was evidently an artist in his way. Each stroke drew blood, and when he moved to the other side, so as to increase the torture by crossing the

strokes, Janie shrieked, and wrenched herself from the hands that held her.

"Oh, stop, stop!" she implored, staggering forward and falling at the captain's feet. "I will tell anything—anything! Only let him go."

"I thought so," remarked the captain grimly. "No, don't untie him, you fool!" he roared to the sergeant. "Let us see what she knows first. Now, mademoiselle, where was this path—how near the road?"

"I don't know," faltered Janie. "It can't have been very far from it, but I think it was straighter."

"You don't know! What do you mean?"

"It was in the dark, and—and I was blindfolded when we travelled in the daytime."

"Ah, well done, well done!" cried the captain. "Prince, this spy of yours was worth catching. Go on, Sascha."

"But I could guess!" cried Janie, catching at his hand. "I would guide you. I know what the path was like."

"And overwhelm us with land-slides? With all respect to you, mademoiselle, I prefer your servant as a guide. Sascha, did you hear me?"

Powerless to escape, Janie cowered on the ground, stopping her ears that she might not hear the lash as it descended. The onlookers had forgotten her now, and were gathering more closely round the victim. At last the surgeon caught the lamp from the hand of the orderly and stooped forward.

"It is my duty to tell you, captain, that the man is unconscious. As the Prince has remarked, he is no good to us dead. It is useless doing any more to-night."

"And not so much as a moan!" said the lieutenant, with something like admiration, as Arbuthnot was unfastened and laid on the ground.

"The fellow is certainly a European," said Prince George, with satisfaction, as he scrutinised the face. "I wish I could remember where I have seen him before."

Janie heard them talking over her head. She had crept up to the rigid form, and was tearing her apron into strips. To bandage such wounds as these seemed hopeless, but what her shaking fingers could do they should. But there was a hand on her shoulder, and she was dragged to her feet.

"Put an extra sentry over the Sister's tent to-night, sergeant, and see that she leaves it on no pretext whatever. The man is in your charge, doctor, and the sooner you can bring him up for re-examination the better for you."

Struggling vainly, Janie was dragged away to her tent to alternate for hours between hopeless misery and burning anger. She had betrayed her country—or, at least, she would have betrayed it if she could—but would even Burree have held out when a fellow-creature was being tortured before her eyes? It was all Arbuthnot's fault. He had not trusted her, he ought to have trusted her; if he had, she could have saved him, without any dishonour to himself. In her rage at this moment, Janie told herself that she would have betrayed anything, without compunction, and with no thought of consequences. If Eleanor would not have done it, it was because she was cold and hard-hearted, and could put abstract ideas before people.

"I hate England!" cried Janie wildly. "The country! It lets these things happen to us and doesn't care. I hope the Scythians will win!"

The horror of what she had said recalled her to herself, and she began to cry pitifully. What would Eleanor have thought of her, and poor Mr Arbuthnot— Oh, what was that wretched surgeon doing to him? He would not know in the least how to manage! If only she might be allowed to help! She called to the sentry at her door and offered him any bribe to let her go to the hospital, but in view of her obviously poverty-stricken condition the sentry remained scornfully incorruptible, and at last she sobbed herself to sleep. Her slumbers were deep and heavy,

and ended only with the voice of the surgeon outside the tent.

"Sister, are you awake? The captain allows me to make use of your help in dealing with your servant."

Janie was out of the tent in a moment. "What have you done to him?" she demanded.

"There was little that could be done. A simple styptic, which brought him to his senses for a moment"—Janie ground her teeth—"but he relapsed into unconsciousness almost at once."

"And you did nothing else? Murderer!" She had rushed into the hut next to his tent, and was rummaging among his stores, seizing one thing and another as it came to hand, and throwing them towards him. "Bring those. If he dies, you will have murdered him."

"I assure you, Sister, it was not my fault. It is very much to my interest that he should live. But I have never seen a case of such complete collapse."

"You judged him by your great brutes of soldiers, of course? Couldn't you see that he has not the physique of a European?"

The frightened surgeon looked at her with obvious admiration, but it was not until afterwards that she realised that in speaking the exact truth she had been supposed to be keeping up a deception as resolutely as Arbuthnot himself. She had collected what she wanted by this time, and the surgeon followed her to the smaller hospital tent. The other patients seemed to have removed themselves, for the only occupant was Arbuthnot, lying on his face. She spoke to him in Hindustani, but there was no response, and with set lips she went about her task, flinging curt orders and an occasional scathing word towards the surgeon, who was scarcely able to obey her.

"Sister, I must go out into the air—I will return," he stammered at last, and she heard him rush away from the tent with a great clatter of his boots on the loose stones. But it also seemed to her that she heard a stealthy return, and that he might not have his

trouble for nothing, she began to talk to her patient again in Hindustani, encouraging him to move slightly, or raise himself a little, that she might fasten the bandages. With a thrill which she could scarcely repress from translating itself into a cry of joy, she felt suddenly that Arbuthnot's hand was seeking hers with quick, apparently aimless, movements. She knew what it meant. He was trying to talk to her in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, in which he had once watched her instructing a deaf mute among the orphans. In feverish anxiety lest the surgeon should possess a spy-hole, she continued to work with her right hand, apparently supporting the patient with the other, on which his weak fingers were spelling out "doctor?" Hurriedly she answered in the same way, "listening outside," and he paused for a moment as if the effort had been too great. But presently, as she was withdrawing her hand, there came the assurance, "Not dead, shamming," the contrast of which with his actual state brought the tears to Janie's eyes. As hasty footsteps announced the surgeon's return, she spelt out hurriedly, "Get well!" and turned joyfully to meet the intruder, who entered with many apologies.

"I am sure he heard me just now when I spoke to him in Hindustani," she cried. "I told him to raise himself a little, and he certainly moved."

The surgeon looked sceptical, but he had good reason for rating Janie's experience above his own, and he lifted the flap of the tent for her politely.

"Breakfast is waiting for us," he said.

If a look could kill, he would have withered under the glance Janie cast upon him. "Eat with you, who stood by to see a man cut to pieces—with the men who had it done!" she cried. "I would sooner starve!"

"As you please, Sister, but it must be in your own tent."

"Excuse me; I am going to nurse my servant. He needs constant attention; you must see it yourself."

"And he shall have it. You don't seem to realise, Sister, that he is to be examined afresh as soon as

possible. Every day that he remains helpless is a waste of the valuable time of our princely guest, who is determined to obtain the information he desires. This is the reason why I am allowed to utilise your kind help in the dressings, but for the administration of food and medicine it is felt that another attendant is desirable. So now we understand one another."

Janie had turned white and clutched at the tent-cord as she realised the full horror of his words, and he unclasped her fingers and escorted her, unresisting, to her own tent. That all her efforts for Arbuthnot's cure should only bring nearer a renewal of the torture—the thought was too horrible! She spent the morning revolving wild schemes of escape, of rescue—all hopeless, for how could she leave him, and how could he be moved? She was faint with hunger, for no food was brought to her, and she began to wonder whether she was to be starved into meekly begging for a share in the meals she had refused. They should never make her do it, she told herself; she could bear any pain if it was merely her own. Then came the thought, How could she help Arbuthnot unless she was strong and well? and it made her welcome the black bread and bitter soup which arrived at the soldiers' dinner-hour. She was to share their rations in future, and not the delicacies of the officers' table, it appeared, and she swallowed the unpalatable mixture heroically. Of the bread, which would have been much more to her taste, she contrived to smuggle quite half into her pocket. If Arbuthnot was to escape he must have provisions, and even black bread of an unknown degree of staleness would be better than nothing.

CHAPTER XII.

EXPIATION?

THE whole of that afternoon was spent by Janie in trying to devise some means of communicating with Arbuthnot. Writing was hopeless, and Hindustani was unsafe, for one of the Hindu spies was fairly certain to be concealed within earshot. The deaf-and-dumb alphabet alone seemed to offer any chance of success, and its scope was painfully limited. She began to wish vainly, as she composed and practised sentences which aimed at conveying all possible information without the use of one unnecessary word, that the English language possessed the concentration of the Latin. When only one or two phrases could pass in an interview, how could things be properly explained? As it happened, when she went to dress Arbuthnot's wounds at night, the surgeon attended her so closely that she was only able to communicate five words, and these spasmodically at intervals in the process. "George—waiting—question—you—again," she spelt out, and his fingers pressed hers in token of comprehension. As a nurse, it was horrifying to her to transmit such disquieting news to a patient, but she durst not leave him ignorant of the truth, though she would fain have added the encouragement which she was not able to give till the next morning, "Collecting bread. Help you escape." This time Arbuthnot was able unperceived to answer, "Bring bread. Hole," and in the evening she managed to smuggle her crusts into his hands, and was conscious that he was hiding

them in a hole he had contrived to scrape in the ground on which he lay.

The next morning it struck her that his bandages were loosened in a way hardly to be expected with a man lying helpless on his face, and through the surgeon, she asked the orderly who had been on the watch during the night whether the patient had been restless. But the orderly declared that he had lain quite still, only moaning a little at intervals, and had taken the prescribed nourishment without difficulty. Janie would have forgotten the displaced bandages if it had not been that when she pushed her piece of bread into the hole that evening, her fingers came in contact with a small, rough bottle—the kind of bottle, as she could tell by feeling it, in which laudanum and similar substances were kept among the medical stores. Her suspicions were awakened again immediately. How could that bottle have got there? Once you were in the stores-tent it would be easy to find it, for the surgeon had no fastidious ideas about locking up poisons, but who had been into the stores-tent? Arbuthnot could surely not have been so foolish as to attempt to bribe the orderly, and if he had, the man would be too ignorant to bring the right bottle. The thought gave her some comfort. Perhaps he had brought the wrong bottle; for what could Arbuthnot want with laudanum? And yet it was frightfully dangerous to confide in a man who would probably only seem to help in order to gain credit with his superiors by betraying any plan the prisoner might form. With her mind in a turmoil Janie spelt out, "Want anything?" and was by no means reassured when she received the answer, "No." Nor was her mind relieved when she found the bandages again displaced the next morning, and she impressed upon her patient's fingers with great emphasis the words, "Trust no one," only to be assured, "I don't."

The next morning there was excitement in the camp by reason of two mysterious disappearances. Prince George lost a revolver and a box of matches which

he had placed at his bedside, and the lieutenant lost a hunting-knife which he greatly valued. After the soldiers had been cross-questioned in vain, suspicion fell upon the Hindus from Bala, who were promptly examined, with little tenderness for their feelings, and promised a repetition of the treatment every day till they confessed. The witness against them was the sentry over Prince George's tent, who asserted that he thought for one moment he saw one of them crouching in the shadow of the next tent, but when he looked again there was no one there, and his testimony seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the Hindus all disappeared from the camp that day. This might naturally be taken to prove their guilt, but Janie, reluctantly remembering the bottle of laudanum, was still doubtful. When she reached the hospital-tent that evening, the surgeon, who escorted her as usual, appeared somewhat perturbed.

"The captain and his Highness are becoming impatient," he said, "and I don't myself think the man is recovering as he ought, considering the care he has received. Perhaps, Sister, it might conduce to his recovery if you told him of their constant inquiries after him, and the interest they take in his health?"

"I won't!" said Janie angrily. "If he understood what you meant it might make him worse, and if he didn't it would deceive him cruelly."

The surgeon laughed. "Well, you won't mind asking him this. I can't help thinking he doesn't get all the food he ought. Will you ask him if old Mikhail the orderly treats him properly?"

Janie repeated the question in Hindustani, and received an answer in a faltering voice almost too weak to hear. "Why, he shares my food like a brother, and sleeps sound all night. What more could I want?"

"I think he says Mikhail treats him like a brother, and that he sleeps soundly," hesitated Janie.

"Who sleeps soundly?" demanded the surgeon impatiently. "Does he want a change of attendants?"

"Certainly not. Mikhail asleep is preferable to any other man awake," came the answer, still in the same weary, broken voice, and Janie assured the surgeon that the patient was quite satisfied. This was not exactly true at the moment, for the patient, who had already spelt out the words, "Bandages slip. Tighter," was impressing upon her with astonishing vigour, "Tighter, *tighter*." She secured them as firmly as she could, sewing them into place with even more than her usual care, and before she left him he had spelt out, "Forgive." She hoped the request was in allusion to the slight cast on her bandaging, but she had a lurking fear that it meant more than that.

There was an alarm of fire in the camp that night. The roof of the old hospital-hut was discovered to be alight, and as water was scarce, the flames obtained a good hold. Janie's sentry remained faithfully at his post—he was the only one to do so, as far as she could see—but he allowed her to look out at the tent door. For one moment she had a glimpse of the other side of the camp, as the crowd of excited soldiers swayed away from the hut owing to a burst of flame, and in that moment she saw Mikhail's face at the door of Arbuthnot's tent, wearing a look of absolute horror. The crowd surged across the field of view again almost immediately, but presently, when three half-suffocated men were dragged or carried from the burning hut into the open air, Janie understood that there was ample ground for Mikhail's alarm. They were three of the sick who had been quartered in the larger hospital-tent, and it was clear that, with the connivance of the orderlies, they had been in the habit of creeping into the hut at night, so as to sleep where they would not be troubled with too much ventilation. As soon as the fire had been got under, the three men, still only partially in possession of their senses, were summarily arraigned on the charge of smoking among the stores, but their denial was so absolute that even the captain was shaken in his conviction. None of

them possessed either tobacco or matches, they pleaded pitifully, and they knew nothing of the fire until one of them was roused by the smoke to find that the roof was in flames. They were all positive that there was no trace of any fire among the stores, save where pieces of the blazing roof had dropped. They were dismissed at length, pending further inquiry, and the officers and Prince George turned back to their quarters.

"Why shouldn't it have been one of those run-aways?" suggested the lieutenant. "They have a grudge against us now."

Prince George shook his head. "I should have expected them to stab a sentry, or perhaps to poison the water supply, but not to venture back into the camp and risk being shot for the sake of burning a single hut."

"Venture back into the camp?" repeated the captain, coming to a standstill. The two men's eyes met.

"Exactly. What about your prisoners?" cried Prince George, and they made a dash for Arbuthnot's tent. It was empty, and the cold air which met them as they entered showed that a slit had been cut in the canvas at the opposite side.

"He can't have been gone long," cried the surgeon.

"There he is!" cried the lieutenant, pointing to a crouching figure which could be dimly discerned trying to make its way between the tents and the rock. The captain drew his revolver and fired, aiming low.

"I think you won't run away again, my friend," he said as he did so, but the yell of pain and the invocation of saints which replied to him were unmistakably Scythian. When the horror-stricken officers reached the spot, it was Mikhail whom they found writhing in agony with a shattered foot, and too incoherent in his lamentations for any information to be obtained from him.

Janie's rest was destined to be disturbed that night. She had just fallen asleep again after the alarm of fire,

when she was roused by the incursion of the guard, who insisted on her rising at once. Giving her barely time to throw on her gown and shoes, they brought her before the captain, who charged her point-blank with conniving in Arbuthnot's escape, of which she heard for the first time. For the moment she was incredulous.

"He must have crept away in delirium!" she cried.

"Yes? and he also secured arms in delirium?" suggested the captain. "Or was that your part, mademoiselle?"

"I? How could I? I can't even leave my tent. But how could he? You saw him yourself," turning to the surgeon. "Could he do all this in his state? He was almost perfectly helpless."

"May I suggest," put in Prince George, "that the affair may be explained by a compact between the prisoner and the runaway natives? He bribed them to help him to escape, and they managed it in the confusion of the fire they caused."

"It seems reasonable," agreed the captain. "But in that case mademoiselle has been tricked equally with ourselves."

"I have," said Janie, with distinct resentment. "Of course I was sure he would escape if he could, but I never thought of his doing it yet, and I can't believe that he would trust those Hindus. Perhaps they—took him."

"Against his will? The idea is ingenious, but improbable," said the captain. "Accept our apologies for disturbing you, mademoiselle. You have satisfied us of your ignorance of the plot, at any rate. But perhaps, as you are already aroused, we may ask for your services on behalf of the unfortunate man whose carelessness has brought upon him a painful retribution?"

The surgeon was much relieved to find that he was to enjoy Janie's assistance in dealing with Mikhail's foot, the wound in which was far beyond his powers of treatment, while Janie wished for Eleanor. Between

them they did the best they could for it, while the man assured them incoherently that he had dozed off for a second—only a second—and when waked by the fire had found his charge gone; how, he could not imagine, since the slit in the tent was not made until he himself, hearing the voices of the officers, cut it in a frenzied effort to escape. Janie herself was inclined to believe, as she had suggested to the captain, that the fugitive Hindus had carried off Arbuthnot, in the hope of recommending themselves to the British authorities by saving him, but he must at least have been a consenting party, and she could not imagine that he would run the risk of trusting them. On the other hand, could he possibly have escaped alone? The object of the laudanum was quite clear, now that she knew of Mikhail's taste for invalid delicacies, so was that of the matches—though she was sure Arbuthnot was equally ignorant with herself of the presence of the sick men in the hut—and the weapons. The loosened bandages, again, and the entreaty for forgiveness, were explained by this hypothesis; but could any man in Arbuthnot's state, however resolute his will might be, survive the physical exertion he must have undergone night after night? And supposing desperation nerved him to such an effort, how soon would that fictitious strength fail? Had he dragged himself, with incredible difficulty, out of the camp only to be caught by the Scythians in the nullah, or to perish of weakness and starvation on some almost inaccessible ledge?

This night and day seemed to Janie the longest she had ever known. The Scythian search-parties sent out in pursuit of the fugitives took two directions, that of the road, and that by which Arbuthnot and Janie had reached the nullah from the east, for the rocks surrounding the camp were so precipitous that it was agreed it was impossible to scale them. A certain measure of success rewarded both parties. That which had gone towards the road discovered traces of blood on the rocks in the nullah, and that which had turned

eastwards returned to the camp late at night bringing with it the escaped Hindus. These were unanimous in declaring that they knew nothing of Arbuthnot, and had fled purely in consequence of the charge of theft brought against them. They had hidden, during the day of their escape, in a hollow between two rocks a little way down the nullah, but had left it as soon as darkness came on, long before the fire at the hut occurred. This account, supplemented by the testimony of the other search-party, could hardly be disbelieved, and the captain and Prince George comforted the Hindus for their undeserved sorrows by a gift of money, and the promise of large rewards if they could succeed in tracking Arbuthnot, while Janie found a cold comfort in the recollection that they did not belong to the tracker caste.

The next day a small party, taking with it two of the Hindus, set out down the nullah to continue the search in the direction of Gajnipur. They returned almost immediately, guiding a messenger who had got through from Bala, and whom they had met at the mouth of the nullah. The skill of the Scythian engineers, seconded by the forced labour of many Bala coolies, had been instrumental in making a temporary road along the *débris* caused by the landslip, so that communication with the advanced post was once more open. The news caused great joy in camp, and the pursuit of Arbuthnot seemed to be shelved by mutual consent in favour of going to meet the road-making party from Bala. The officers and Prince George started officially with escorts, and the men followed in twos and threes, until by the afternoon the camp was deserted by all but the guard and the sick, of whom Janie was left in charge. The unusual silence struck her forcibly as she came out of the hospital-tent, and she observed with astonishment that even the sentries were taking advantage of the absence of authority to relax the bonds of discipline. The one at the entrance to the nullah had left his post and drawn near the guard-tent to take part in a dispute

going on there, and Janie's own particular sentry was asleep in the shade of a hut. Her heart beat wildly as she realised that here, in the nick of time, was a chance of escape. By nightfall communication would be established with Bala, and she might be sent back as soon as it was known that she was here. She looked across at her own tent. No, to visit it would be a dangerous risk; she must abandon everything. In the pocket of her gown were the two crusts saved since Arbuthnot's departure, more from habit than from any hope of using them, in her apron-pocket was a bottle of antiseptic lotion. She stepped back into the tent and took up a water-bottle, and thus equipped, slipped round behind the doctor's tent, passed the sentry, deeply interested in the quarrel which had drawn him from his post, and walked out of the camp. There was no time to think what hope she had of accomplishing the journey to Gajnipur, alone and unarmed, with neither hat nor sandals, nor even a cloak to protect her from the night cold; the chance of escape was before her, and she took it.

It was very hot in the nullah, for the heat seemed to radiate from the rocks on either side, and she was obliged to pick her way slowly, taking advantage of every patch of shade. She found the place where she and Arbuthnot had crossed to meet the sentry, and re-crossing it, followed the path until she came to the steep bank they had descended when the Scythian footprints misled them into turning up the nullah instead of down. It was a long, dreary scramble, and she was in constant terror of meeting some of the soldiers returning from the new road, but there was no one to be seen. From this point she followed the now unknown track with increasing excitement and trepidation, watching for what she dreaded to see, the marks of blood on the rocks in the dry torrent-bed. It was nearly another hour before she sighted one of them, and thenceforth she scrutinised narrowly the opposite bank of the nullah. She knew, what the Scythians did not, that the path Mr Brooke had taken must turn

off somewhere here, and she knew also that the marks on the rocks were not left there by accident. Her bandages could not have slipped in Arbuthnot's journey from the camp hither, therefore he must have left these traces with the deliberate intention of misleading pursuers. Presently a second mark confronted her, some little way in front, but a dozen yards before it there was a break in the nullah wall. It was a very slight break, merely the channel of a tributary torrent, now as dry as the nullah itself, but Janie knew that on their last night of freedom Arbuthnot had been looking for just such a place. She crossed at once, and began to scramble up, wondering how a man in Arbuthnot's condition could have faced the climb. Hot and breathless, she reached a spot out of sight of the nullah, and found that the torrent-bed led, as she had hoped, westward. This, then, must be the path. Now for the cave, in which she could lie concealed while daylight lasted, and continue her journey when the moon rose. She explored one rocky hollow after another without success, but at length came to one in which her footsteps awoke an echo for which the cave seemed scarcely large enough. There was a huge piece of loose rock at the back, which might conceal an inner chamber. Not without timorous thoughts of bears, she approached it, peeped round it, and found herself looking into the haggard eyes of Arbuthnot, who had raised himself on his elbow, revolver in hand.

"Oh, it's you!" she cried in delight.

"I knew it was you," he answered. "I heard your step. But I didn't know who might be with you."

"There's no one. I have escaped. Oh, I wish I had brought some bandages! But I can make you a little more comfortable."

"There's no time," he said morosely.

"It won't take long—just while we talk. You will be able to walk so much better, and I have the lotion here. Why did you go so suddenly, without telling me?" as he submitted to her ministrations without any appearance of gratitude.

"I couldn't take you with me, and it was better you should be able to tell nothing."

The blood rushed into Janie's cheeks, but she felt she had deserved the rebuke. "But why go so soon, before you got any better?" she asked meekly.

"Because it is a matter of life and death. They are plotting to blow up the Chilan Viaduct, as they did the bridge at Payab, and isolate Gajnipur as they did Shah Bagh. They will choose the time when the remains of the Shah Bagh force are retreating on Ranjitgarh, of course. I heard the captain and the lieutenant discussing the details one night as I lay outside one of their tents. The dynamite is stored somewhere near the camp, ready to be carried down when their agents in the railway department give the word."

"How dreadful!" said Janie. "But — oughtn't Gajnipur to know quickly?"

"Must lie low while they are looking for me," growled Arbuthnot. "No!" with a sudden change of tone, "why should I try to hide it? I am here because I simply couldn't move. The exertion of getting away from the camp and climbing up here did for me. I have lain for two days and a night as you found me."

"And no wonder!" cried Janie. "I am only surprised you are alive. But now you will have me to help you, you know."

He looked at her strangely. "And how did you manage to get here?" he asked.

"Why, I was like the man who languished in prison until it came into his head to open the door and walk out," said Janie, busy with her bandages. "I walked out of the camp when the sentry wasn't looking."

He twisted his head round to look at her in a kind of despair. "And it hasn't struck you that you were purposely allowed to go out, in the hope that you would come straight to the place where I was hidden?"

"Oh no!" Janie dropped her scissors. "They couldn't! Who would have thought of such an awful

thing?" But her tone was less confident, for it was forcing itself upon her that Arbuthnot was right. "Let us go on at once!" she said hastily. "With my arm you can walk quite fast, and there was certainly no one in sight when I climbed up here."

He stopped her with a motion of his hand. "Only one of us can go on," he said. "One must stay behind and be caught, or both of us will be. Now let us think of it as it affects other people, not ourselves. The one who has the best chance of getting to Gajnipur and giving the warning must do it. It is for you to choose."

"But I don't even know the way!"

"I will draw you a map on the ground. You shall have my knife and revolver, and what food I have."

"And you—will you stay here?"

"Certainly not. I shall go back to the nullah and give the Scythians a good run for their money, leading them away from you."

Janie's face whitened. "No," she said slowly; "I will go back."

Arbuthnot looked at her keenly. "Then you are the bravest woman I ever saw," he said.

"No," said Janie again. "It is only—there is nothing else to do. You have more chance of getting through than I have. You can't deny it. Please lend me your knife."

"What do you want it for?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, not to kill myself! I am a missionary, you know. Not even to cut my arm," with a dreary smile, as she glanced at a roughly bandaged wound on his forearm. "I only want to have a reason for being caught."

She cut the stitches at the side of her shoe, leaving a gaping hole between the sole and the leather, then put the shoe on again, and rose. "Here are two crusts to add to your store," she said. "I see you have a water-bottle. Let me fill it up from mine. I will leave you the rest of the lotion. Good-bye. Try to

forget that I would have betrayed you if I could the other night."

"Wait, Miss Wright—one moment!" cried Arbuthnot. "If I live, I'll come for you, and if not, I'll give the charge to Brooke. Don't be afraid of being left in the hands of the Scythians, if we have to search all Asia to find you. And look here, if you hear anything like a fight any night, get under your bed and stay there till you hear yourself called, so as to keep out of the way of bullets. Good-bye, and keep up heart!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A MAN OF MANY WILES.

SLOWLY, and as if dazed, Janie made her way back down the slope which she had climbed with such high hopes. She dropped her water-bottle, and the little that remained in it was spilt, but she took it up again mechanically when she reached the ground. There she hesitated a moment. Why not walk slowly back towards the camp, or at any rate sit down and wait to be captured? She was terribly tired, and the sun's rays, which seemed to have lost none of their power, beat upon her unprotected head.

"It's a good thing he wouldn't let me go with him, if walking this little way has knocked me up!" she said to herself, but as she said it she knew that it would have been very different if she had been allowed to care for him as in their earlier wanderings he had cared for her. She could have kept up bravely then. "But I must go on!" she cried, with sudden recollection. "I have to lead the pursuit away from him, of course. That was what he was going to do for me."

She turned her face resolutely down the nullah, and dragged herself painfully over the rough ground for half an hour longer. Then she sat down to shake the loose stones out of her damaged shoe, and fell into a kind of doze. The sound of voices roused her, and with the calmness of despair she looked up to see the lieutenant and a party of soldiers confronting her. They did not appear exactly triumphant, but though she could not

flatter herself they were sorry for her, the reason for their disappointment eluded her mind.

"Well, mademoiselle!" said the lieutenant, not unkindly; "you have been as unsuccessful as ourselves, it seems. I think you will hardly run away again in thin shoes. What have you done to your water-bottle?"

"It dropped. The water was spilt," she answered, hardly able to speak, and he called up one of his men and told him to let her drink from his.

"Now, if I may trouble you, mademoiselle. You will probably prefer to put on your shoe?" as Janie tried to stand. She obeyed, and accepted meekly the help of his hand to rise stiffly to her feet. She could never afterwards remember much about that journey back to the camp. At the time it was a vague phantasmagoria of rocks which seemed mountainous to look at, but collapsed like feather-beds when she set foot on them, of angry expostulations from the lieutenant, and frantic clutchings at his reluctant arm. Somehow, quite unexpectedly, they were in the camp, and the wavering forms of tents and men crystallised into the figure of the captain. He alone stood still, and everything else seemed to revolve slowly round him. She saw, without understanding it, a swift glance of inquiry pass from him to the lieutenant, to be succeeded by evident disappointment.

"And pray, mademoiselle, why did you run away?" he demanded, and his voice enabled her to collect her thoughts.

"It was a sudden impulse, monsieur. The sentry was not looking, and I started just as I was."

"You had no confederate—no message?"

"None, monsieur. From whom——?" Everything was wavering again, and the captain's face and the buttons of his uniform were like pieces of a Chinese puzzle.

"You will be guarded against such impulses in future, mademoiselle. I have orders to send you

back to Bala immediately, and until you start you will not leave your tent."

"Oh, please, may I go and lie down?" asked Janie irrelevantly. She did not know what answer she received, but in some way she had arrived at her own tent, and she had just strength enough left to reach her bed. "Fever, of course," was her last conscious thought. "It must have been the sun. I ought to get some quinine. Burree will bring it me when she comes back from hospital."

There was no question of Janie's returning to Bala on the morrow, for she was down with fever, much to the perturbation of the surgeon, who tried to make use of any intervals of consciousness to inquire how she ought to be treated, receiving contradictory answers which almost drove him to despair. Prince George was able to throw a little light on the subject, and the patient herself possessed a good constitution and a professional instinct of obedience which stood her in good stead, so that five days after her attempted escape she was able to recall its circumstances. One thought then tormented her perpetually.

"Was I delirious? Did I talk much?" she asked the surgeon, as lightly as possible, at the earliest opportunity. She had grown so much accustomed lately to speaking French and Hindustani that she might only too probably have used either unconsciously and fatally.

"A great deal, but chiefly in English. One night you were painfully excited. You asked me repeatedly, '*Vat ees caive een Frainch?*'" he imitated her pronunciation. "At last I carried the question to the Prince, who was able to interpret it. I returned and consoled you with the word *souterrain*, which seemed to afford you the keenest of pleasure. You repeated it in a happy voice, and appeared to sleep."

"How funny!" said Janie, with a terrible sinking of heart as she realised how nearly she must have betrayed Arbuthnot's hiding-place. "Things return to one so curiously. We took refuge in caves several

times as we came from Bala, and I was always afraid there might be bears. But of course I had Ghulam Qadir with me."

"Ah, of course, and on your return journey you will be abundantly guarded." He watched her narrowly, noting the wave of dismay which swept over her at the prospect, then spoke abruptly. "Sister, I know why you are afraid of being sent back to Bala. There was a letter from Prince Pavel Bakhmatoff to Prince George here. We have amused ourselves with it considerably." Janie gazed at him in speechless disgust, and he hurried on. "Do not fear me; I am your friend. I have no reason to love these nobles, not I. I will contrive delays. You cannot travel yet, then I can gain a day or two by declaring that I need your help with Mikhail, and when we can delay no more, I have still a plan."

"You are very kind," said Janie, in a humiliated voice. She disliked the man, and disliked yet more feeling indebted to him, but she could hardly refuse the proffered help. It was merely pride, she told herself, that prejudiced her against him. No doubt he was thoroughly worthy, in his own way, and it would be the height of foolishness to make an enemy of him. The thought that she would not for some days be in danger of being sent to Bala was in itself soothing, and she was glad to give up the hopeless task of trying to plan an escape. The surgeon gathered from her face that she was disposed to trust him, and nodded confidently to himself as he left her.

As it happened, the course of events played into his hands. When he approached her tent the next morning, the sentry stepped forward to meet him, making a sign for silence, and handed him something small and white. It was a paper, neatly wrapped round a small pebble, and on the paper there was writing. He glanced up sharply.

"It fell close to the tent just after sunrise," explained the sentry in a hoarse whisper. "I could not see where it came from, but I think it was

from up there." He pointed to the rocks encircling the camp.

"And she does not know? It did not wake her?"

"It made scarcely any noise, and fell on the edge of the tent-cloth. I picked it up at once. She may be still asleep."

"Good. This must go to the captain immediately. If any more come, take care she does not see them."

He assured himself that Janie was not awake, and sought the captain at once with his prize. His first impulse had been to keep it to himself, but unfortunately, the writing was in English, and Prince George, the only available translator, could not be relied upon for secrecy. But the doctor did his best to give necessity the air of very shining virtue, as he approached his commanding officer with intense mystery, and laid the missive in his hand.

"This fell close to the prisoner's tent this morning. It could hardly have been thrown from the rocks, but a sling or an air-gun might have sent it. She knows nothing."

"Good!" said the captain curtly. "What is it—English? Where's the Prince? Come, lieutenant."

Prince George, with the paper spread before him, smiled as he read it through, and translated it hastily into French.

"DEAR MISS WRIGHT,—I have only just heard of your unpleasant position, but I hope soon to have you out of it. The best chance of rescue would, I imagine, be on your way back to Bala. Poor Ghulam Qadir was not the only person who knew the secret paths, you remember. The man who carries this is trustworthy. If you show yourself for a minute or two before sunset outside your tent, he will know that you are still in the camp, and if you look up to the rocks on the north side, he will understand that you are to be taken back to Bala immediately. If you can manage it without observation, wave your

hand to show that you have received this, and I will send you further directions.—Believe me, yours truly,
A. BROOKE.’”

“Who is this Brooke?” demanded the captain.

“An old fox,” was Prince George’s reply. “He is a great hunter and knows these parts well, and he led the party of prisoners that escaped from Bala.”

“Ah, and he knows the secret paths? It is clear that we must have him. He has given us the means, I think.”

“Make mademoiselle answer the letter, and use her as a bait,” suggested the lieutenant. The captain shook his head.

“No, I won’t admit her into the secret if I can help it. You can never tell what wild thing a woman will do, and sometimes she is successful. I think that, with the help of our good doctor, we may make her useful unknown to herself. The important thing, you see, is that she should appear outside her tent this evening and look up at the rocks. I suggest, doctor, that you should recommend to your patient a little gentle exercise. With the help of your arm, she could surely accomplish a few steps, and it would hardly be beyond your ingenuity to direct her attention to the cliffs. Seeing you in such close attendance, the messenger will not expect her to wave her hand.”

“And meanwhile, I take two men and come upon the miscreant from behind?” cried the lieutenant eagerly.

“No!” thundered the captain again. “It is Brooke we want, not his tool. The messenger escapes, unsuspecting because unsuspected, as he believes—returns to Brooke, receives the further instructions and returns here. Then we intercept him.”

“While Miss Wright will have been despatched to Bala at earliest dawn to-morrow?” suggested Prince George. The captain turned upon him with good-humoured despair.

“Am I the only man here who can follow a tangled clue?” he cried. “Mademoiselle must be visible in

the camp, or the messenger will not deliver his promised instructions. Then we shall know where the attempt is to be made, and shall act first."

"My patient is really not well enough to venture outside the tent to-day," observed the surgeon hesitatingly.

"So much the better. Otherwise we should have to invent a reason for detaining her here a day or two longer. If she has a return of the fever, even Prince Pavel must be satisfied."

"How can this man Brooke have heard she is here?" asked the lieutenant, fingering the paper. "Can the servant have reached Gajnipur after all?"

"It would have been better to shoot him," said the captain regretfully. "But no; is he not bringing us another prisoner in his place? Brooke does not guess how warmly he will be welcomed here—the excellent and cunning Brooke!"

Janie was much perplexed that afternoon by the surgeon's determination that she should get up and try to walk a little. She did not feel able even to stand, and she was quite certain she ought not to attempt it, but a convincing reason was at hand.

"It is to deceive the Prince," said the surgeon. "He will write to his friend Prince Pavel that I am hastening your recovery in every possible way, and Prince Pavel will be content. If you are thrown back, it is only my excess of zeal that is to be blamed. I will support you. Now, do you not find the air agreeable? How fine is the aspect of the cliffs, dark in the sunset! See, what was that? Why, what a fool I am! I thought for a moment I saw a man up there. Let us turn this way."

Janie had looked up eagerly, shading her eyes with her hand. She saw nothing, but her companion's furtive glances and sudden starts almost convinced her that he was more fortunate. The intruder could not be Arbuthnot, still tied by weakness to the neighbourhood of the camp, or perhaps wandering in a circle till he came back to it? At the thought a

deadly faintness came over her, and the surgeon was obliged almost to carry her back to the tent.

"That is excellent!" he said consolingly, as he laid her on her bed. "After this, you cannot possibly be moved for several days. Do you doubt now that the wit and devotion of a plain man are potent even against the power of princes?"

The word "devotion" lingered unpleasantly in Janie's mind, and she had a vague feeling that the surgeon's wit needed a good deal of co-operation from herself, but in the relapse that followed that evening's exertion she was too ill to be conscious of anything more than that a new cause for alarm had in some way been added to those already existing. It was disagreeable to find, as she grew better, that her doctor seemed to have learnt nothing from the unfortunate results of his heroic treatment, but was most anxious that she should get up and sit at her tent-door under an awning, though he would graciously excuse her from walking about. To secure her compliance he appealed to her gratitude. He was under suspicion, he said. It was quite clear that the captain was beginning to believe he was in league with her, and scheming, at her desire, to keep her from being sent back to Bala—and did she wish him to ruin his career because he had tried to help her? The lack of generosity in the man's nature disclosed by the plea revealed his character very clearly to Janie, but she shut her lips tightly, and allowed herself to be helped out and established in the chair—only to find that she was to be allowed to stay there as long as the doctor was with her, and no longer. He brought another chair and settled himself near her, evidently anxious to talk.

"In this tormenting uncertainty, I think it best to make you acquainted with my plan, Sister," he said. "I cannot discover from the captain whether you are to be left in peace here longer or not, and if you are suddenly sent back to Bala we may have no opportunity of coming to any agreement."

This was so far true that the captain declined to

formulate any plan of action until he had seen Mr Brooke's "instructions" to Janie, and the surgeon was inclined to plume himself on his adroit manipulation of facts. It was unfortunate for his purpose that he felt obliged at this moment to give a violent start and look up at the cliff, drawing Janie's attention thither so completely that she did not for some time realise that he had returned to his subject, and was suggesting that she should marry him. She withdrew her eyes from the cliff in consternation.

"But it is quite impossible, monsieur!" she cried.

"You have not followed what I say, Sister. I will get leave to escort you to Bala, I tell you, on the plea that you are still dangerously ill, and before reaching the end of the journey, I will hurry on and secure the services of Papa Sergei, the chaplain, who is my cousin. He will protect you, even if he cannot arrange matters that day."

"But think of the injury you would do your prospects!" urged Janie desperately. "You told me just now that you were already in trouble for your kindness to me."

"Oh, that is for the present. I look forward to the future. You will assist me in the care of the sick; we shall obtain good results. My name will become known; perhaps I shall even be decorated. After the war—well, my work will come to the knowledge of the Empress. I have a hold on the paymaster, and he has a brother a clerk in the office of one of the Imperial estates. I shall be appointed to inquire into the organisation of the army hospitals—a fine opportunity. Imagine—not only a liberal salary, but innumerable presents from officials who fear that I shall report upon them adversely. A handsome fortune and a high official position—that I am certain to attain, and you will rise with me!"

"But you are not even qualified!" said Janie cruelly.

"That? Oh, that is a mere detail," he assured her. "We shall arrange it easily, when we have a little

money in hand. I could have managed it before, if I had not trusted a scoundrel who robbed me of my last rouble without bringing about the promised arrangement. You see, then, that though a marriage with you may prove disadvantageous to me at present, I expect to be fully repaid in the future."

Janie did see this with great clearness, and it may have lent some asperity to her answer: "Do not fear, monsieur; the repayment will not be needed. You shall not sacrifice yourself."

"My esteem for you makes it no sacrifice, Sister. You will observe that I base my project on what I know of your powers."

"Still, you will be glad to be assured that it isn't needed. If I am ordered back to Bala, I shall go.' Her eyes were straying again to the cliff, and she went on rather inconsequently. "I suppose it was a foolish thing to try to escape. My friend and I were in a sort of panic, and the means of escape were at hand, and it seemed as though it was meant that I should go. But I suppose it wasn't."

The surgeon did not seem to find Janie's mental conflicts interesting. "The reason for your flight remains what it was," he said. "To it you have already sacrificed the life of the unfortunate man who passed as your servant." Her quick glance of anxiety pleased him, for it showed that she suspected nothing, and he rose abruptly. "We have discussed this long enough. I will help you back into the tent. Once you are on the way to Bala, I think you will be glad to remember that an honest man is prepared to make your future his care."

"Or rather, his future my care!" thought Janie rebelliously, as he gave her his arm. She considered herself an unsentimental person, but the exclusively businesslike aspect of the surgeon's wooing roused her to active resentment. "The only thing that would make me consent to marry him would be the assurance that he would never get any of the benefits he expects!" she said to herself, and felt better.

Outside the tent the sentry had taken up his position before the door, while the surgeon lurked in the rear. He it was who heard the soft thud on the edge of the tent-cloth when the sentry's back was turned, and caught up a second message wrapped round a pebble, at the same time firing off his revolver. The next moment his apologetic voice reached Janie.

"A thousand pardons, Sister. I hope you were not startled? It had jammed, and I was examining it. How came I to be so frightfully clumsy? I might have shot my thumb off."

Janie answered faintly that she was not startled, but as a matter of fact the shot fired so close at hand had carried her thoughts back to Arbuthnot's last warning, though she had not had time to put it in practice, and the surgeon went off to the captain's tent. Prince George was already there, the lieutenant was not, for the reason that he had been spending the afternoon hidden among the rocks with three of his men, waiting until the revolver-shot should warn him that the messenger was at the top of the cliff. Without waiting for his return, the paper was unrolled, and Prince George proceeded to translate it:—

"DEAR MISS WRIGHT,—I was delighted to hear you had received my first message safely. Now to business. I write this from a place that might have been made for our purpose, where we can lie snugly, with a good view up and down the road, until we see your escort approaching. I know you would like to know when to look out for us, but I dare not trust the particulars to paper, for if this miscarried, we might find ourselves between your captors on one side, and an overwhelming force from Bala on the other. If my messenger manages to get a chance of speaking to you privately, you can ask him. I can only say, stay as quiet as possible when the fight begins, and keep out of the way of bullets. I hope to see you very soon.—
Yours truly, A. BROOKE."

"Really this man's prudence is superhuman!" cried the captain, in high glee. "He shows us how to obtain even the information that he withholds."

"You will strengthen mademoiselle's escort considerably, captain?" suggested the surgeon, seeing hope for his plans.

"I shall not send mademoiselle at all. She might discover our intentions, or she might be hurt in the attack, and either would be bad for us."

"You will despatch an empty litter, well guarded, to draw the attack, and a strong rearguard to repulse it?" asked Prince George.

"My friend, why should we invite attack in a disadvantageous position—a narrow road overhanging a precipice and commanded by cliffs? I shall take a strong party and beat up this wasps' nest, this famous hiding-place, before they can possibly look for us. Consider; the messenger will be expected to hang about our camp at least until to-morrow morning, in hope of learning from mademoiselle when she is to start. It is not likely that he would wait longer than that. He will return to his master's hiding-place, and he will guide us there."

"You will appear to allow him to escape, and have him tracked?" asked Prince George doubtfully.

"No, I have tried that plan once already, by the doctor's advice, and it failed. This time our guide will have a rope round his neck and a revolver at his head. His consent will have been already secured."

"Are you not afraid that he may lead you wrong, or deceive you as to the number of men with Brooke? Do you propose to ask for a force from Bala?"

"No, I propose that we should do the work ourselves, and gain the honour. I have no fear of a large force. In view of the difficulty of obtaining provisions for an uncertain time, Brooke will bring as few men as possible. These will be escaped prisoners like himself, and they must be wiped out. He himself must be taken alive, that we may learn the

secret of the paths, but after that—well, he has merited the death penalty more than any of them. As for our guide, he will not find much encouragement to take us by wrong roads. Ah, lieutenant, have you made your capture?"

"We came upon the fellow from behind, captain, and you never saw any one so terrified. I thought he would have died of fright. Quite a different sort from mademoiselle's servant."

"You see?" the captain nodded confidentially to Prince George. "Well, we will instruct him in his duties."

Late that evening, Janie was roused from sleep by distant shrieks. Shivering with horror, she recognised them as cries for mercy in Hindustani, and she crawled to her door to expostulate, but the sentry refused to let her pass. The shrieks ceased suddenly, and she wondered, in sick terror, whether the man was dead. When the surgeon appeared in the morning, she attacked him at once.

"You were torturing one of those Hindus last night. How can you be so cruel? Don't you see that it will give all Scythians a bad name throughout India?"

"Dogs must be beaten when they are troublesome," said the surgeon coolly. "But don't be afraid, Sister, there was no torture. The fellow was taught obedience in three strokes, and grovelled at our feet in his joy at being released. He swears to prove his gratitude by showing himself the most useful servant in the camp, and the captain has forgiven him so far as to give him the chance of it. How he is treated afterwards depends on himself alone."

There was the suggestion of a double meaning about the speech, and it worried Janie. Could the man have discovered Arbuthnot in some hiding-place, and be proposing to betray him? It did not quiet her fears to learn that the greater part of the Scythian force, with Prince George's Bala bodyguard, were about to make an expedition into the hills. She could not believe

that they would take so many men merely to surprise Arbuthnot, and she wondered if there was any British force, or perhaps a body of refugees, near enough to be attacked. The surgeon would throw no light on the matter. He was accompanying the column, and displayed a curious uncertainty of manner, springing from alternate reluctance to leave Janie under the lieutenant's charge, and the wild hope of obtaining permission to go on to Bala after the expected fight, and thus make sure of Papa Sergei's sympathy and support. The force marched soon after sunrise, led by the unwilling guide, who was kept well in mind of the conditions of his employment by the rope secured to his neck and wrists, and the two stalwart soldiers who were told off to cut him down at the first sign of treachery. He led the way down the nullah to the slope by which Arbuthnot and Janie had entered it from the east, paused a moment, as if in doubt, looking down towards the road and back towards the camp, then began to climb the bank, followed by the Scythians. On a ledge in the cliff some little distance away a small, grey-haired man, in clothes indistinguishable from the rocks among which he lay, closed his binoculars and smiled a slow smile.

The unusual pleasure of finding herself free from the surgeon's supervision spurred Janie to much greater feats than his rather disturbing care. She dressed, very slowly and with many pauses, but found herself obliged to rest before she could proceed to the next duty she had set herself, borrowing a broom and sweeping out her tent. So many men were away that her sentry had had his duties extended, and tramped backwards and forwards between her tent and that in which the medical stores were kept. She sat on her bed and watched him carelessly, then noted that something suspicious seemed to have attracted his attention. He lowered his rifle and disappeared round the store-tent, and she held her breath, wondering what such a dereliction of duty might portend. But she thought

no more about it, for "Who should come round the hospital-tent," as she wrote afterwards in a letter intended for Eleanor, (and immediately scratched it out, lest it should hurt her feelings,) "but Mr Brooke himself, with his coy smile and his courtly bow, exactly as if he was coming into the drawing-room at St Martin's?"

She jumped up in consternation. "Oh, have they caught you too?" she cried.

"No," said Mr Brooke. "I think we have caught them."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RISING AND THE FALLING CAUSE.¹

IT was a changed world into which Janie was coming from the hills. The fact was first borne in upon her as she sat at her tent-door and watched her rescuers. Mr Brooke had told her to put her things together, and then rest until it was time to start, but it was better than any rest to enjoy the luxury of hearing English talked again, though the speakers were too busy to do more than exchange a casual greeting in passing. They were all civilians, except one Engineer officer, the reason for whose presence she did not at first divine, and she had met several of them in Bala—road or telegraph or canal officials whose occupation was for the present gone, and one stalwart young missionary, whom she had seen at Conference, and who assured her he had come on this expedition strictly as hospital assistant, under a solemn promise not to fight unless the party was in danger of annihilation. Success had made them cheerful, and she caught the nicknames by which they chaffed one another. Mr Brooke was “the Old Shikari,” the missionary “the Fighting Parson,” and the Sapper “Cooke Junior”; she herself, as she gathered from a remark not meant for her ear, was “the Damsel in Distress,” and was supposed to be the object of a romantic adoration on the part of Mr Brooke. But watching their faces as

¹ “In no part of the world is the principle of supporting a rising interest and depressing a falling one more prevalent than in India.”

they worked, she thought she discovered a new expression on all of them, of dogged resolution not unmingled with resentment. It is a look frequently worn by the Briton in times of public calamity, and signifies that with the highest hopes and best intentions on his own part, he has been brought by his leaders into an unpleasant position. He will probably regain the lost ground, somehow or other, but those leaders will suffer, unless they can earn forgiveness from their placable country by some timely feat of arms—preferably of a melodramatic character.

The proceedings of Mr Brooke and his friends were very mysterious to Janie. The Engineer and one or two others were busy for some time inside the last hut in the camp, which was built against the rock on the south side of the basin, and the rest were striking tents and dismantling huts, and making a huge pile, which suggested a bonfire, of them and of their contents, while the Scythian lieutenant and his men, who had hardly yet recovered from their surprise at being captured, looked on stupefied. Then three litters were made from tent-poles and canvas, one for Janie and the others for Mikhail and another of the Scythian sick, who were unable to walk. For the latter bearers were chosen from among the prisoners, while Mr Meadows the missionary and another of the rescuers carried off Janie at such a pace that she was obliged to plead for mercy, though the rough walking in the nullah soon necessitated a more steady progress. When they had arrived at a spot midway between that at which the Scythian force had turned eastwards that morning, and that at which Janie had discovered Arbuthnot's westward path, Mr Brooke halted his party and divided it. Three men, besides Janie's bearers, remained with him in attendance upon her, the rest moved on with the prisoners. Upon this the Scythian lieutenant's patience gave way.

"Monsieur," he cried in French, stepping forward and confronting Mr Brooke, "I demand to know what you intend doing with us."

"That will appear very shortly, monsieur."

"To destroy our camp and leave us without provisions in a country where no food can be obtained is murder, monsieur. I suppose it is useless to protest, since you must be aware that the lives of your whole party are already forfeit twice over, but I can promise favourable consideration for the cases of any of them who will insist on our receiving proper treatment as prisoners of war."

"I do not propose to mete out to you the treatment you and your commander think proper for prisoners, monsieur. If I did, you might have reason to complain. You have been removed from your camp for your own sakes, as you will soon perceive. Your arms have been taken from you for ours, but you will receive two days' rations per man, which will carry you back to Bala, and I can only advise you to start as soon as you can get your men's hands untied."

He bowed, and turned back to Janie, and the prisoners' guards led them on down the nullah.

"I began to be afraid you meant to kill them," confessed Janie; "but I couldn't believe it."

"In cold blood? Hardly," said Mr Brooke, with all his old deliberation. "When I saw poor Arbuthnot in the Gajnipur Hospital, I felt like taking a rifle and going out to stalk any Scythian I could see, but you will notice that we have managed this affair without shedding a drop of blood. I suppose it doesn't alter our status as civilians taking part in warlike operations, but if we are shot for it, even Meadows will be satisfied that we suffer innocently."

"Then Mr Arbuthnot really got to Gajnipur?" asked Janie.

"Well, he got far enough to be picked up and brought in by two of our native scouts. He is doing well now, but they can't send him down to Ranjitgarh just yet. Now I think we might go on, as the others are out of sight."

They went on as far as Arbuthnot's path, and Janie was hoisted up the slope with considerable difficulty.

Once at the top, they were not long in reaching the cave where she had found Arbuthnot, and here they halted to wait for the rest. Janie had innumerable things to ask Mr Brooke, but he seemed oddly uneasy, fidgeting in and out of the cave with his watch in his hand, and at last insisting that she should be carried out into the open. It was very hot there, though the afternoon was waning, and though they had arranged a canvas awning for her doolie, but he seemed so much more at his ease that she could not complain. Presently he looked at her quizzically.

"Would you rather be prepared for a shock, or not?" he asked. "Lie down, all of you," to the other men, with a sudden change of tone.

"Oh, I had rather be prepared," she answered quickly.

"Then expect one—in another minute."

"Surely we shan't feel it much here," suggested Mr Meadows.

"It all depends how much dynamite there was," said Mr Brooke drily, and Janie understood.

"Cooke Junior has bungled his fuse," muttered one of the men, after two minutes' waiting, but the words were scarcely out of his mouth before the explosion came—not nearly as terrifying in itself as in the way its report echoed among the mountains, producing the effect of a whole series of explosions on every hand. Loose rocks came rolling down, and a thick cloud of dust descended, but thanks to Mr Brooke's precautions, no one was hurt.

"Puts an end to their train-wrecking for a bit," said Mr Brooke, getting up and trying to brush the dust from his clothes.

"Oh, but they may have some more dynamite," said Janie.

"No," Mr Meadows assured her; "they commandeered all there was in Bala, and this was it. They couldn't well bring it over the passes with them, you see."

"I never dreamed it was so close to the camp,"

said Janie. "How did you find out where it was?"

"Arbuthnot suspected it was there, and that put the Sapper on the track," said Mr Brooke. "It was pretty clear that this camp was the depot of the train-wrecking parties, so he was allowed to come with us."

"Parties of men came in several times, and reported to the captain, and went away with great loads," said Janie. "I thought it was provisions, but I suppose it was dynamite."

"Both, probably," said Mr Brooke. "Well, I hope the Chilan Viaduct is safe now. Ah, here come the rest. All well?"

"All right, sir!" responded several voices. "I left a man to see that they didn't track us up here," added the Engineer.

"Good. And there was no party coming down from Bala? That was the one weak point we could not guard against," said Mr Brooke, turning to Janie. "We could not tell when they might be sending reliefs to the camp, and it would have been serious if they had arrived in the midst of our proceedings. Even if they tracked us now, however, I think we ought to be able to reach the horses safely."

While he spoke, the party was forming in order of march, and it struck Janie at once how completely each man seemed drilled to his duties. Her doolie was now carried by four, who were relieved of their rifles by others, and the rest of the party shouldered the baggage—infinitesimal in quantity—brought from the cave, where it seemed that they had spent the night. Three alone were left unencumbered, and they went ahead to scout, while three others remained as rearguard, to be joined presently by the man left on the watch at the nullah.

"They are just like soldiers!" said Janie admiringly.

"Oh no, I hope not!" said Mr Brooke. "To my partial mind, they are infinitely superior, but of course the Sapper would think me irremediably cracked if he heard me say so. They are the nucleus of Brooke's

Shikaris, Miss Wright—the Mounted Infantry company that I hope to raise. I have done a good deal of volunteering in my time, but it always seemed to me that the results were not worth the trouble and money expended. I said so to various Regulars I knew, and they quite agreed with me, but challenged me to do better with the material. So I worked out a rough scheme, and now I hope to put it to the test of practice. We can't get to business just yet, because the Military Department has so many more important things on hand that it can't spare three minutes to authorise the raising of another company of Volunteers, so we practise a certain amount of drill, and keep our hands in by expeditions like this. Of course the authorities don't approve of us, but I will do them the justice to say that it will only need a dozen of us to be shot or hung as *francs-tireurs* to set them making out the authorisation with apologies. You see our object? I am beginning my New Model Volunteers from the top, with a corps of picked men—a sort of Guides, but all Europeans, of course. Every man is a good rider and a crack shot, with an eye for country. We have adopted Meadows as chaplain, because he is qualified in the essential points, in spite of his ecclesiastical limitations, and Arbuthnot will be scout-master."

"But won't the Intelligence Department want him?"

"If they do, he must go, of course, but he can't do the work again that he has done. He is branded now——" as Janie looked up anxiously. "Even if he recovers completely, he can never get rid of those scars, and they would give him away in any disguise as soon as he was searched. But we'll find him plenty to do—don't be afraid;" for Janie had hidden her face, shuddering. "No man who can shoot need be idle."

"How are things going with us?" she forced herself to ask.

"How far are you up to date? Have you heard

of the attempt on the life of the Commander-in-Chief?"

"Yes, Prince George told me he was killed."

"But he was not. They blew up his house, and killed two of the staff and several servants, but he is recovering—so they say. Did you hear that war had begun again in the Far East?"

"They said that they had driven the Xipanguese into the sea, but I didn't believe it."

"Well, not quite. But they have overrun all the territory they had evacuated, and sent the Sinite troops scampering. The Xipanguese were badly surprised just at first, for though they expected treachery, they had counted on the Sinites' being some good. But they concentrated wonderfully steadily round Port Horatio and one or two other points, and now they are preparing to reconquer the country. Of course the Scythians will retreat slowly, trying to draw them further and further inland, just to keep us from taking advantage of the Alliance by getting the help of the Xipanguese Army."

"And do we need it?"

"Well, there's no denying that the Granthistan troops have been badly knocked about, though we have come off better than we had any right to expect. You see, it saves you a great deal of trouble when you have only to guard one door by which your enemy can possibly get in, but if your enemy shuts the door when you are out, it is awkward."

"Keys keep people in, as well as out," said Janie, quoting the saying which had become proverbial with her and Eleanor.

"Quite so, and as the Payab key was in the hands of the Scythians, our men had to break into their own house some other way. They were hampered by the Shah Bagh non-combatants, but they marched eastwards to Badhi, with the tribes up all round them. Then they struck south, and the Sappers managed to rig up some sort of bridge where the passage is made easier by islands. The crossing was

unopposed, except for perpetual sniping from the tribesmen, but when they got to the other side, they were miles from the railway, and knew that the Scythians were holding it. However, it was given out that they were to march towards it, but a strong flying column was made up, as soon as its units got across, to cut through the hills and make a dash for Ali Hassan. The losses were frightful, but they did it—it's one of the finest things one has ever heard of—and they turned out the small Scythian force holding Ali Hassan, which wasn't expecting them, blew up the railway to the north as far as they could go, and entrenched themselves to wait until the rest of the army came up—all that will ever come up, that is."

"Was it so bad?" murmured Janie. Mr Brooke, walking beside her, nodded gravely.

"What can you expect? The distance was not great, but it was through hilly country, and all the independent tribes up the river to the borders of Bala-tarin came down like vultures. Forage scarce, no means of supplying the place of the baggage-animals as they dropped, water difficult to get, disease rife, crowds of women and children and helpless camp-followers to guard—the wonder is that so many have got through. If the Scythians had ventured to leave the railway and attack them on the march, it would have been the Khoord-Cabul affair over again."

"Then from Ali Hassan onward they were safe?"

"By no means. As soon as enough men had come up to hold the place, the flying column had to go off again, for there was another chance for the Scythians at Guldán, and they were racing to take it. Happily a messenger had got through from Ali Hassan to Gajnipur, warning the people there to guard the line and keep it open, and the Scythian advanced-guard, which got to Guldán first, was caught between the flying column and a Gajnipur force, and squelched. They are still bringing on the remains of the Gran-

thistan troops from Ali Hassan to Guldán, and forwarding them to Gajnipur, while the Scythians amuse themselves by blowing up the line and attacking derailed trains. We have given up attempting to use the rail above Guldán, and between Guldán and Gajnipur it is now so well patrolled that the train-wreckers have to go to work very circumspectly, but it will relieve a good many minds to know that the Bala dynamite is accounted for."

"Oh, but how the men who have escaped will fight!" cried Janie. Mr Brooke's face hardened.

"We will hope so—presently," he replied. "Just now, their supreme desire seems to be to get as far from the Scythians as possible."

"What! Englishmen?" cried Janie in horror.

"And natives—it's the same with all of them. We must not judge them too hardly," catching her look of disgust. "They are demoralised at present, but think what they have been through—practically fighting a rearguard action all the way round from Payab. Think of the horrors they have seen—enough to burn themselves into a man's brain for ever. To the untutored mind it would seem that they wanted a spell of steady routine work and good feeding to restore their health and their self-respect. But they are turned out of their overcrowded trains on the Mall at Gajnipur, and sorted roughly into those that are fit for service and those that aren't. Those that are passed get a fresh equipment and are sent off at once by train—in the rains—to join the force assembling at Agpur. They have lost their officers and their comrades, their nerve—well, I won't say it's gone, but it's worn pretty thin,—you can see in their eyes what they've gone through. But they are 'seasoned soldiers,' so off they go—to court disaster."

"But I thought Englishmen never got like that," wailed Janie.

"The men of the flying column have not, because they had definite aggressive work to do, and did it. But inaction, or a difficult retreat, plays the mischief

with British troops. It was so in the Peninsula, you remember, and in the Mutiny—and no longer ago than the last Ethiopian War, which our present authorities ought to recall. But they haven't learnt their lesson, and that is why I imagine that we are not at the end of our troubles yet."

Delivered in Mr Brooke's deliberate, unimpassioned tones, the sentence had a finality which made Janie shudder. Seeing this, he spoke more cheerfully. "Now I won't answer another question on the subject of our misfortunes, or you will get no sleep. I see we are close to our halting-place now. We shall rest here for a few hours, until the moon rises, and then go on again and get to the horses before morning, I hope. There is the smallest tent you ever saw, brought for your special benefit, and the advanced-guard are under strict orders to have some soup ready for you."

"Oh, how kind you all are!" cried Janie gratefully. "Why should you take so much trouble about me?"

"Why? because you are a heroine, and we are proud to have rescued you," said Mr Brooke, raising his voice slightly. An approving murmur greeted him from the rest, and he turned again to Janie. "Arbuthnot told us how you went back to the Scythians to give him a chance of escape, and these fellows here were picked out of four times the number who volunteered as soon as it was known what I had in hand."

"Oh, if you only knew!" murmured Janie, remembering the night when only lack of power, and not of will, withheld her from betraying her country.

"Never mind," said Mr Brooke. "Very likely you didn't feel like a heroine when you did it, but that only makes it more heroic, you know." Now here we are. Gently with the doolie. A little soup, Miss Wright, and then bed. Only a campaigner's bed, though—the ground and a cloak."

The soup, heated over a spirit-lamp by the advanced-

guard, and faintly flavoured with methylated, was duly administered, and Janie crawled into the minute tent erected for her. She found reason to believe that the hardships of campaigning were to be considerably mitigated in her case, for each man of the party seemed to have contributed his martial cloak—or something answering to it—in the hope of making her comfortable. In fact, there was very little room for her, but she curled herself up among the superabundant wraps, and fell into the most peaceful sleep she had known for many nights. It seemed a very short time before she was roused, but already everything was ready for the march, and as her bearers moved off with her, the tent was struck, and all traces of the halt were gone. It was very cold in the moonlight, and she was glad to find one of the coats which had formed her bed thrown over her.

“Better have your sleep out,” said Mr Brooke’s voice. “I wish we could have let you alone till morning, but I am nervous till we reach the horses.”

“Oh, but I am not sleepy now,” said Janie eagerly, contemplating with some alarm a substantial sandwich pressed upon her with apologies by the cook of the party, who had discovered the extraneous flavour of the soup. “There are so many things I have thought of that I want to ask you, if you don’t mind,” she added, nibbling daintily at the sandwich for the sake of the cook’s feelings.

“The continued history of our misfortunes—a sort of ‘Thousand and One Nights’?” asked Mr Brooke. “If I am to act Shahrzadeh, I fear the Emperor of Scythia is the only monarch who would be likely to spare my life for the sake of what I had to tell. What else do you want to know?”

“Well, then, why are they assembling troops at Agpur?” asked Janie, in a strenuous attempt to discover a gleam of brightness somewhere in the prospect.

“To meet the Scythians advancing from Iskandarbagh. When it was found that they had cut our

communications with Shalkot, by blowing up both lines of rail, it was thought that they would certainly make a dash for Sahar, so as to dislocate the railway system, and the Second Army is waiting for them there. But they have not turned up, and a column which was sent up from Alibad to make a reconnaissance in force reports only a small number of Scythians with native allies, who retreat as soon as we get into touch with them, so there is a little nervousness as to where the main body may appear. Of course the idea is to catch them between the Second Army and these patched and cobbled Granthistan troops."

"But isn't that a good plan?"

Mr Brooke shook his head slowly. "Don't ask me. I have a foolish prejudice against letting the enemy make the first moves, and then arranging ours to meet him. But if I suggest that it was always understood we were to take the offensive in a case like this, and face the enemy before he could even reach our borders, I am reminded that the British Government, holding 'aggression' in holy horror, and preferring that its own subjects should suffer rather than other people's, has sentenced us to fight him in the plains. And the result is that we are horribly afraid of his making for Ranjitgarh, and that hampers our movements. But it seems to me that when Gajnipur is evacuated, there will only be Bihet between him and Ranjitgarh."

"Gajnipur to be evacuated?" cried Janie.

"So it is understood. The idea is that its only use is to guard the roads to Shah Bagh and Bala, which are both lost—for the present, at any rate."

"But are they to stay lost?"

"That's exactly what we are all asking. Gajnipur is a base of supplies—practically a fortress. One would expect it to be strengthened in every possible way as the advanced post from which the lost territories were to be reconquered, but it's quite clear there's no thought of that. Of course, if Agpur fell, Gajnipur might be isolated, but one might almost as well anticipate the

fall of Calcutta. There is something very queer going on, which nobody can quite make out, and the authorities seem to be paralysed. Some people say that the Commander-in-Chief has lost his nerve, or his brain-power, or his courage, since he was blown up, but others say that the Government is acting under strict orders from home. We poor wretches who are outside both political and military circles don't know what to believe, but we don't like the look of things at all."

"But Bihet is not nearly as strong as Gajnipur, surely?" asked Janie, recalling hasty glimpses of a great railway bridge and a straggling town traversed on journeys.

"It is not fortified at all. But it must be held, because it covers Nizamabad and the railways to Ranjithgarh and Agpur. So they are throwing up entrenchments to protect the bridge, and I suppose we shall hold on to Gajnipur long enough for them to make it safe."

"But I can't make it out!" cried Janie hopelessly. "Why is it that all these dreadful things are happening? The Scythians can't have as many men as we have, and yet they seem to beat us everywhere on our own ground."

"A certain young lady," said Mr Brooke reflectively, "told me once that she could always get on splendidly at chess if it wasn't for her opponent." Janie felt the poles of her doolie shake, but she could not be sure that the two men in front were smiling. "In the same way, we should get on much better if the enemy hadn't such a habit of doing what we don't expect. He won't fight on the ground we have chosen, but gets round behind and takes us at a disadvantage, and he adds to his numbers by raising the tribes against us, which we think is not cricket, though we employ them in our own ranks—when they don't desert and join their friends. He performs impossibilities, too—what we had agreed to be impossibilities, I mean. It is a way that enemies have, or I suppose all wars would end in a deadlock—the impact of an irresistible force on an

immovable mass. It was impossible for an invading force to arrive by way of Bala, impossible to overcome the opposition of the Ethiopians, impossible for an army either to reach Iskandarbagh without a railway from Rahat, or to construct one—impossible, in short, for India to be invaded at all by any of the three routes which the Scythians have actually adopted. Well, how are you to cope with a situation like that?"

"What do they say at home?" murmured Janie.

"The spirit of the Government and the country is all that can be desired," answered Mr Brooke gravely. "The Prime Minister made a fighting speech in introducing an emergency vote of twenty millions or so, which has united all parties in a glow of patriotic fervour. I understand that any ill-advised person who ventures to refer in public to 'keeping the cordite down' is promptly kicked out of any society he happens to be in. It is proclaimed on all hands that England will expend her last man and her last shilling before losing her hold on India. Of course it is a little unfortunate that you can't improvise armies the morning after your great speech, and get them embarked by the next evening, but the intentions of all concerned are excellent. The promised reinforcements have not materialised as yet, but we are assured they are going to be sent, all in good time—when they have had their six months' training, no doubt—and meanwhile our spirits are kept up by cabled reports of the stirring letters communicated to the 'Daily Notice' by its special correspondent out here—who do you think?"

"Not Mr Cholmeley-Smith?" hesitated Janie, remembering the Philosophic Radical's exploit in providing news for the 'Pathfinder.'"

"The same. You can hardly imagine what a power he has become. When he started off to Ranjitgarh at the earliest possible moment after we got to Gajnipur, we were unjust enough to think he was scuttling off home, but he turned up again by a supply train, in the full glory of a correspondent. Through his political

connections he has some pull over the great Harperston, and they play into each other's hands. Cholmeley-Smith gets special facilities which drive the other correspondents wild, and in return he writes up Harperston as a general rather superior, on the whole, to Napoleon. Perhaps it's as well that there should be one soldier for whom he has a good word, for in everything else he follows the new rule of military criticism—never ask a soldier's opinion when there's a civilian who can be induced to give his."

"I suppose he comes to you pretty often?" asked Janie innocently.

"Have I deserved that, Miss Wright?" with slow dismay. "I thought you were going to ask me why he believed in Harperston, and I was prepared to remind you that all Indian Army men will tell you Harperston is no soldier, nothing but a nice old woman for coddling the Tommies. No, Cholmeley-Smith does not come to me much for opinions. I am tainted with militarism, you see, because of my unsuccessful efforts at volunteering. And now, don't you think you had better try to sleep a little?"

"There were a great many more things I wanted to know," murmured Janie vaguely, but this time she was ready to adopt his suggestion, and speedily dreamed that she was sailing in a small boat on a choppy sea.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CITY OF CONFUSION.

GAJNIPUR was a disenchanting place at this time to any one who cherished, like Janie, a devout belief in the staying power of the British race, and its faculty of rapid recuperation under disaster. The beautiful Mall was turned into something between a caravansery, a barrack-yard, and a battlefield, and strewn with the wreck of an army. Here and there a man possessing force of character hitherto unsuspected had come to the front, and was establishing a small island of order in the midst of chaos, but as soon as such a man attracted the eye of authority he was promptly seized upon to take charge of a draft ordered to Agpur, and chaos closed again over his labours. Privates without officers and officers without privates sought each other vainly, half-caste refugees from Shah Bagh camped among miscellaneous stores and derelict guns, and distracted native clerks wandered through the turmoil, calling rolls to which no one answered, and endeavouring to check the salvaged *débris* by means of the beautiful lists, indents, and returns, which had been the pride of their hearts in the days before the flood. Every available soldier was to be hurried forward to Agpur—there was no time to wait for stragglers to come up—and therefore the waifs of various corps, divided roughly into British and native, were hastily gathered into units of some sort, and sent on to join the humorously named “Composite Force,” which was

assembling at the famous city of beggars, tombs, dust, and heat.

Janie found her niche at once, happily for herself. Her adventures, or some part of them, had become public property, and the Army Nurses claimed her as at once a colleague and a patient. Their work was heartrending, and seemed never to end, for no sooner had one set of sufferers been despatched by hospital-train to Ranjitgarh, than another came in from the north—unfortunates crippled by ghastly wounds or enfeebled by disease, who had contrived to drag themselves on, or had been helped along by comrades, until they reached the railway at Guldán. Janie could not help in the nursing at first, but she prepared bandages, padded splints, cleaned instruments, and made herself generally useful. Mr Brooke watched over her to see that she did not do too much, and once he borrowed a cart and drove her round to the other end of the station, to see Arbuthnot, who had been in the civil hospital, and was now being sent down to Ranjitgarh, whither his former district-inspector at Agpur and his wife had imperiously summoned him to come and be properly nursed. Even the glimpse she had of him in the cave had not prepared Janie to see him wasted to a shadow and hardly able to speak, but he was as cheerful as it was possible to be in a whisper, and made her promise to let his friends know as soon as she was likely to be sent to Ranjitgarh. This time came sooner than she had expected, for when she was pronounced fit to go on duty, and was looking forward to the luxury of relieving her friendly hostesses for some hours a-day, she was summoned to the presence of the Medical Officer.

“I am sending you down to Ranjitgarh by the hospital-train leaving to-morrow evening, Nurse Wright. Major Saundersfoot there writes to me that they have taken over the Antony School of Art as a hospital and put him in charge, and that he is at his wits’ end for nurses. All the fine ladies of Ranjitgarh seem to be devoting themselves to the care of the

wounded, with unfortunate results, and he asks if I can send him some one with proper training to organise things. He was promised a full complement just out from home, but they seem to have gone astray on the railway somewhere, and may not turn up for weeks. Your rank will only be temporary, of course, but it will be a good opening for you."

Promotion of this sort was not at all what Janie desired. At Gajnipur she was as near as she could possibly be, in present circumstances, to Bala and Eleanor, and Ranjitgarh seemed to be infinitely farther off. But Mr Brooke, who was quartered with the Commissioner of the district, an old friend of his, might be trusted to watch for any chance of communicating with St Martin's, and there is no denying that the prospect of the work before her put Janie on her mettle. One of the prizes of her profession was to be hers, if only for a time, and it was her duty—she knew Eleanor would have said so—to accept it. She received her instructions from the Medical Officer, sent a note to Mr Brooke, who telegraphed her impending arrival to Mrs Thorpe at Ranjitgarh and made what preparations he could for her comfort during the journey, and left Gajnipur with the hospital-train at the appointed time.

In spite of the glory of her future position, she felt very small and lonely in the busy bustling crowd when she arrived at Ranjitgarh station, and it was a great relief when one of the doctors who had travelled in the train came to her help and steered her dexterously towards a worn, worried-looking lady in a preposterously large *topi* whom he had heard inquiring for her, in a gentle voice of pathetic hopelessness, of all manner of impossible people. The lines disappeared as if by magic from Mrs Thorpe's forehead when she realised that the object of her search was attained, and she linked her arm in Janie's with real friendliness.

"Oh, Sister, I am so glad I have found you! I couldn't see any lady getting out of the train, and I am so terrified in a crowd—I had a fright in a riot at

Agpur once—and some of the men I asked about you were so rude! But I promised Mr Arbuthnot to look after you, and indeed, I meant to take you home with me, though I don't know where we could have put you, for our house is full of refugees from the Agpur district—people we knew when we lived there. But your quarters will be ready at the Antony School, and I will drive you there and help you to settle in, and you must come over to us as often as you can. But I do think they are not treating you properly, for they ought to have sent some one to meet you."

The speech was jerked out in gasps, as Mrs Thorpe and Janie threaded their way with difficulty through the throng, but at this point it was interrupted by the helpful doctor, who pursued them waving a telegram. It was addressed to Janie, and Mrs Thorpe insisted on wedging her into a temporarily unoccupied corner to read it. Her face grew blank with dismay as she realised that it was from the Gajnipur Medical Officer, and conveyed the news that Major Saundersfoot had wired announcing the arrival of his own nurses. The worried look returned in sympathy to Mrs Thorpe's face, and Janie felt certain that she was planning how she could fit one more guest into a house already over-full. But Janie had made up her mind.

"I will go to the Antony School, at any rate, and see if I am wanted," she said; "but perhaps you wouldn't mind driving me to Dr Blumenthal's first. I ought to report myself to him, and he may have something to suggest."

"Oh, the missionary? He lives near the Divinity College, I know. If we could manage one more tent in the compound——" Mrs Thorpe's mind was still bent on hospitality.

"He is our secretary. I ought to have written to him before," said Janie, as they made their way slowly to Mrs Thorpe's cart. But the grey-haired clergyman whose study they presently invaded could offer them little comfort. He received Janie kindly, but with a sort of despairing calmness, only natural in one who

had found himself suddenly with all the missionaries of the province dependent upon him for board and lodging. Some had come into Ranjitgarh in good time, some had escaped with their lives and little else, and some had been violently deported by commanders of columns who had been sent out to rescue Europeans, and were in no wise moved by the determination of these particular Europeans to remain and face death with their native flocks.

"All our verandahs are occupied," said Dr Blumenthal hopelessly, "and the grounds of the College are packed with tents. And we can't send our missionaries down country, for the railways are blocked with troops, and the coast towns are full of refugees, and the homeward-bound steamers are crowded to the very deck."

"Oh, don't trouble about me," said Janie, assuming a cheerfulness she did not feel. "I have a letter from the Medical Officer at Gajnipur to Major Saundersfoot at the Antony School, and he will be sure to find me some work and a corner to sleep in."

"His nurses have arrived," said Dr Blumenthal, "and I understand that all the volunteer helpers have already been dismissed. But I think you might be of use as an interpreter, for they are only just out. They should have arrived three days ago, but their train was shunted for the passage of the troops from Sahar."

There was a suggestion of comfort in the poor man's tired voice, as he contemplated the shifting of one of his encumbrances, at any rate, upon other shoulders, and he bowed the two ladies out almost cheerfully. No sooner were they in the cart again than Mrs Thorpe burst out with,

"I know! We will turn Captain Smith out to sleep with the bachelors in the garden, and you shall share the drawing-room with Mrs Smith and the children. I see exactly how to manage it. We will go home at once."

"Oh, to the School first, please!" entreated Janie.

"I am under orders, you know, and I must report myself."

Mrs Thorpe complied, though unwillingly, with the request, and from her disjointed remarks Janie gathered that she was still anxiously contriving rearrangements of furniture to suit the altered circumstances. She had little thought to spare for her driving, and seemed to avoid obstacles—and they were many—almost mechanically. Troops, baggage-animals and carts, were everywhere, and the streets were almost as crowded as the station had been. Janie was struck by a new sense of irritability which seemed to pervade the European portion of the crowd, and led to frequent small collisions with the gazing natives, who in their turn showed unwonted resentment. It is natural enough, when you are conscious that your country is going to the dogs, to feel a grudge against the brown brother whom you suspect to be rejoicing in your misfortunes, and the fact is hardly likely to deepen the brown brother's sympathy with you. A feeling which had beset Janie on her first arrival in India, but which she had soon lost, now rushed over her again—the sense of being crushingly, awfully out-numbered. The crowding, watchful natives, with their soft footfall and their impassive faces—what might they not do if this new assertion of independence among them should proceed from looks to acts? By the force of numbers alone they could sweep away British and Scythians alike, as the tide sweeps over a child's sand castle.

"I will offer Mrs Allen to exchange my piano for that large *almirah* of hers," Mrs Thorpe was saying as they drove into the compound of the Art School, and the decision seemed to be a relief to her mind, for she banished the thought of furniture, and insisted on accompanying Janie to Major Saundersfoot's office. Major Saundersfoot was a stout man with a bald crown and a rumpled fringe of hair which suggested irresistibly that in the distraction caused by his labours he

had torn all the rest out by the roots. He turned round with a war-like glare when a timid *chaprasi* entered his presence, but subdued its malevolence when he saw ladies, and spoke politely but with great firmness, evidently uttering a formula constantly on his lips.

"Much obliged, but the hospital is now fully staffed by the Indian Army Nursing Service. If you will leave your address with the clerk in the third room on the right, I shall be glad to notify you if we need volunteer help at any time."

He returned to his papers, and looked round again explosively when Janie advanced to his desk.

"I have a letter from Colonel Garry at Gajnipur," she said meekly, and he snatched it from her hand.

"Trained?" he cried. "Why didn't you say so? 'Most useful woman in India,' are you? Well, we'll make use of you here. Where's your uniform? I thought you were one of those—those females with whom we were afflicted till the Sisters turned up. Sister M'Kay told me that either the ladies must go or the nurses would. I left it to her to manage it, and she routed them with great slaughter. Report yourself to Sister M'Kay at once, if you please—as a supernumerary until a vacancy occurs. I'll send a *chaprasi* to show you the way."

Still closely attended by Mrs Thorpe, Janie followed the *chaprasi* to the office of the Senior Sister, or Deputy-Superintendent, as she was properly styled, only to learn that she was off duty at present. The Sister who was taking her place demurred to Janie's suggestion that she should find some corner in which to deposit herself and her belongings, and get ready for work at once.

"Sister M'Kay would not like it at all," she said. "I couldn't take the responsibility. She has a visitor at present, but no doubt she will see you. If you would explain——?"

Her helpless glance at the servant showed that she spoke no Hindustani, and Janie made the man under-

stand what she wanted. Once again she and Mrs Thorpe were ushered through corridors until they reached a vast room which was evidently intended to serve as a resting-place for the nurses who were off duty, since various casts and copies dating from its art school days had been left on the walls, and a few incongruous-looking long chairs imported. The man requested them to wait while he went to the shaded verandah, where a very distinct and penetrating voice could be heard speaking in English.

"The verandah is sacred ground, evidently—matron's sitting-room," murmured Janie. "Oh, where have I heard that voice before? M'Kay? If she has red hair, she must be the M'Kay who was probationer under me at the East End."

There was a momentary pause as the servant delivered his apologetic message, then he retired hurriedly, casting a deprecating glance at Mrs Thorpe and Janie as he passed them, and the voice continued.

"She said, 'I think you can't be aware that I am the Lieutenant-Governor's niece?' I said, 'I don't care if you're the Princess Royal; I won't have you here—giving oatmeal porridge to enterics!' She faced me out, and said he begged for it, so I told her a pro. of a week's experience would have known better than to give it him. That did seem to touch her up a little, and she said very haughtily, 'You forget that at Lucknow the ladies of the garrison nursed the wounded.' I said, 'Yes, and do you know the proportion of deaths to recoveries in the Lucknow siege?' I thought that would have crushed her; but would you believe it? she seemed to think it had nothing to do with the subject. So I saw it was no good trying to spare her feelings"—the silent auditor allowed herself a timid but irrepressible laugh—"and I simply told her to go. When she made a fuss I threatened to call the servants to turn her out, and you would think I had suggested dynamite. She looked as though she could have killed me, but she went."

Mrs Thorpe's eyes met Janie's with dismay, and they

both coughed emphatically. A murmured reminder from the visitor followed, and Sister M'Kay spoke again.

"No, don't you go. I'll see this woman and dispose of her. I suppose she's another of them."

She pushed back her chair and came into the room—tall and large-boned, with a well-drilled air about her, and hair that was undeniably and markedly red.

"Major Saundersfoot told me to report myself to you for duty," said Janie, as boldly as she could.

"We have no vacancies for amateurs," was the chilly reply.

"I trained at a London hospital." The moment did not seem propitious for claiming acquaintance.

"A girl told me that yesterday, and when I questioned her I found that she had been in training three weeks, and was sent home as incompetent." Sister M'Kay was scanning Janie with cold eyes.

"I have my certificate. For the last four years I have been in charge of a hospital out here."

"What hospital?"

"St Martin's, in Bala—on the way to Bala-tarin."

"A Mission hospital? I know what that means—native girls to do all the work, while you hold prayer-meetings over the patients. Can you speak Hindustani?"

"Yes," said Janie, restraining her rising indignation.

"Then I suppose we can make use of you as interpreter. Have you no uniform?"

"No, I had to leave all my things behind when I escaped from Bala."

"Well, you must get one of some sort. Perhaps Sister Lawson will lend you things for a day or two. Report yourself to her in Ward II. 'Life School' is painted up over the door."

The audience was over, and Mrs Thorpe and Janie found themselves in the corridor. The elder lady was trembling with wrath.

"Oh, my dear, what an awful woman!" she said.

"Don't stay here another minute. Come home with me."

"She is rather military," said Janie, "but I'm sure she's a splendid nurse. We all said she would be in the old days. Nothing could conquer her when she had once made up her mind. She used to get into frightful rows with Sister and Matron, but she could manage the wildest patients. And if I can really help her with the language, it would be wrong to give up. But if she threatens to call the servants to turn me out, I'll come to you, Mrs Thorpe."

Even after this promise, it was only very reluctantly, and with many misgivings, that Mrs Thorpe consented to waive her claim, and that not until they had together tracked Sister Lawson to her sanctum in the dressing-room attached to the Life School, and she had given tea to them both, and a welcome to Janie, and generally proved herself to be made of different metal from her superior. Nevertheless, Janie was under no misapprehension as she watched her friend drive off. Mission hospitals were not in favour among her new associates, and any faults in training or temper that she might betray would be put down to the discredit of missionaries generally.

The next few days were a time of trial—possibly salutary, but certainly unpleasant—for the little autocrat of St Martin's. She was not allowed to go on duty in the wards, but was kept at all sorts of extra work which the Army Nurses considered to lie outside their province. Even this it was difficult to perform to their satisfaction, since she was continually being called off to interpret for one or other. Sister M'Kay's appearance was admirably calculated to impress the natives—they called her the Red Devil among themselves—but she knew nothing of Hindustani, (her way of putting it was that the wretched natives knew no English,) and misunderstandings seemed to dog her steps. The frightened servants, anxious only to escape from her presence, would pretend to know what she meant, with dire results when she discovered what

had been done in assumed obedience to her orders. She refused to let Janie attend her constantly, but found it necessary to summon her many times a-day, and Janie calculated that she covered some miles of corridor in obeying these calls. It was a real relief and rest when she ventured to claim her evening off duty for the purpose of dining at the Thorpes'. The Captain Smith whom Mrs Thorpe had mentioned to her, and who had been wounded in the foot while covering the retreat of a convoy of women and children before a force of local rebels, came in the cart to fetch her, and mentioned casually that he was sleeping in the garden, as Mrs Thorpe had contrived to add another lady and two more babies to the number of her inmates.

The house, when Janie reached it, seemed to her to resemble a much overcrowded hotel. It was some time before she could distinguish her hostess, and still longer before she discovered Arbuthnot on a couch in a corner of the verandah. Evicting two small boys from the chair beside him, he begged her to come nearer, but the small boys, balked in hearing of his adventures, hung about and made conversation difficult, until one of the babies opportunely, (though unfortunately for itself,) discovered a wasp in a crevice it was investigating. At first Janie thought it her duty to offer medical aid, but Arbuthnot pointed to the solid phalanx of sympathisers surrounding the protesting infant, and declared that he was far more in need of her attention. He looked much better than when she had seen him at Gajnipur, though an occasional twitch of pain when his couch was jarred by someone's passing roughly showed that he was not yet recovered. This, however, he would not allow.

"Pain?" he said. "Nonsense! I'm perfectly well. It's pure nervousness that makes me wince—just from lying here and expecting those youngsters to cannon up against me every two minutes in the joy of their little hearts. If only some work would turn up for me, I should be like a giant refreshed."

"But you won't be fit for work for a long time."

"You'll see!" He looked at her smilingly. "Only produce the work, and—well, you'll see! Why, you are as bad as the doctors—talking about shock to the system. I told them that all I had gone through since had cancelled the shock, but they won't understand common-sense."

"How did you ever manage to get to Gajnipur—if you don't mind talking about it?" asked Janie hesitatingly.

"Oh, I just dragged myself along somehow." His face darkened. "I'll tell you what I would never let out to another soul—when you left me that afternoon I could have howled! Not merely because I was alone and seedy, but because I had to go on again. I wanted to die in peace. But I thought of you, going back to the camp that I might get away, and I promised myself that whatever happened, I wouldn't die in peace. If I died, it should be on the road, with my face towards Gajnipur. So I went on. But it was—beastly, there's no other word for it. I suppose I shall forget it when I get to work again, but it comes over me at night when I can't sleep. But tell me how you are getting on with the lady Mrs Thorpe calls the Dragon?"

"She hasn't turned me off yet as incompetent, at any rate. Our relations are frigid, but peaceful."

"I knew you would stick it out. Mrs Thorpe was certain you would arrive here, bag and baggage, the next morning, but I told her you were as brave as they make them, and would face any dragon. So, failing you, she had the courage to take in Mrs Masterman and the twins."

"Oh, that reminds me," said Janie, in distress, "I wish you wouldn't call me brave. And it was very kind of you not to tell Mr Brooke and his friends how I offered to show the path, but I feel that they ought to know. I was going to tell them several times, but I couldn't."

"I should think not!" cried Arbuthnot. "Don't

you see that what you did afterwards in cold blood more than made up for it? Why, it wasn't even as if it had done any harm."

"But that was only because it couldn't. And what's more, I know I should do it again in the same circumstances. I am not brave, really. If I can do anything to help, I don't mind what I see, but to sit and look on, and be able to do nothing——"

"Well," said Arbuthnot slowly. "I suppose I ought to know, and I tell you plainly that if my life was at stake in similar circumstances, I would trust it to you."

"Would you, really?" Janie was comforted for a moment. "Oh, but that's different. You couldn't trust the country to me. Now to Burree you could."

"If you had really known, you wouldn't have offered to tell."

Janie shook her head, still unconvinced, but before she could answer, the direction of Arbuthnot's eyes drew hers to the door leading into the house. "Why, there's Brooke!" he cried. "Then Gajnipur is evacuated."

"No, I am not the last man to leave the burning fortress," said Mr Brooke, overhearing the last words as he came up and bowed to Janie. "The Sappers who were to blow up the line were in the last train, and I came with Rawlins and the civilians in the first. But we understand that almost as soon as we were out of the place it was occupied by a Scythian force from Bala."

"From Bala? Then there can't be more than five hundred of them, or a thousand at the outside."

"So we say, who have been there, and know what strength they are in, and how many men they need to hold their communications. But in the bazars here they swear that there are fifty thousand at least, and the Intelligence Department, 'after careful inquiry,' puts them down at five thousand, besides Bala troops. Which suggests future developments."

"Ah!" said Arbuthnot quickly.

"The scare has had one good result—I have leave to raise my Shikaris. I went to headquarters as soon as I got here, and didn't come away till I had my authority. By the way, I saw your chief, Arbuthnot. He wanted to know if you could get down as far as his office to-morrow."

"Rather!" said Arbuthnot. "What's up?"

"Oh, general smash. Did you hear that the Scythians have appeared at Dera Galib?"

"No!" cried Arbuthnot and Janie together.

"Yes, and what's more, they have taken it and got across the river. The question now is whether we can stop them before they intervene between Agpur and the Second Army. Cholmeley-Smith left us at Nizamabad, on his way to Agpur, as keen for the fight as any vulture."

"Now I wonder what was the object of making Agpur our base?" said Mr Thorpe, who had joined the group. "You and I know something of the people, Arbuthnot, and I don't think we should either of us choose to have them behind us with an active enemy in front."

"I fancy it was because it is convenient as a railway centre, and is indubitably on this side of the river," said Mr Brooke drily. "We are sentenced to fight the Scythians 'in the plains,' you know. Also, if we ever meant to hold Dera Galib, it is too late now."

"Well, I hear there is trouble already about using the tomb of Sarfaraz Khan as a wireless telegraphy station," said Mr Thorpe. "You remember it, Arbuthnot—the one with the high minaret, on the side of the hill?"

But here the butler intervened with the announcement that dinner was ready, and the conversation was not resumed. When Mr Brooke drove Janie back to the Antony School that night, she found that she was not the only person who had taken an evening off duty, for one of General Harperston's carriages was

driving away, and Sister M'Kay, very imposing in full-dress uniform, was mounting the steps before her. She turned as Janie caught her up.

"Is it true that you are the Mission nurse who escaped from Bala with the scout Arbuthnot?" she demanded.

Janie admitted that she was.

"Then why did you say nothing to me about it?"

Janie wavered between truth and politeness. "I didn't think you would care to hear," she said at last.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sister M'Kay with terrific emphasis. "You kept it quiet on purpose, because you knew I should be interested. Well, you may call it humility, but I call it sulks!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TREASONS, STRATAGEMS, AND SPOILS.

AN air of excited anticipation, half-repressed but impossible of concealment, hung over the city of Ranjitgarh, and in the Antony Hospital the patients made fierce demands for news, and declared periodically that they could hear the guns—a feat which was obviously out of the question, since the seat of war was well over two hundred miles distant as the crow flies. In one way and another it had come to be known that this day was to see the simultaneous forward movement of the Second Army, advancing along the railway from the south, and the Granthistan troops, operating from Agpur, against the position secured by the Scythian force which had captured Dera Galib Khan. It was generally understood that if the authorities at Agpur had known their business they would have thrown forward a force as far as the river Tindar, to secure the railway bridge and prevent the Scythians from crossing, but confiding in the reports brought in that the enemy were few in number and much exhausted by a long march through waterless country since leaving Iskandarbagh, they had not done so. As a result, a Scythian flying column, taking advantage of the railway from Dera Galib, had contrived to establish itself with indecent haste on the Agpur side of the Tindar, and was reported to be receiving constant reinforcements. Strong entrenchments had been thrown up, commanding the passage of the river, and cavalry scouts had encountered those

of the British in the direction both of Agpur and of Dostabad, which was occupied by the advanced-guard of the Second Army. The Scythian force was thus holding the apex of a triangle, the two sides being formed by the railway lines up which the British columns were to move, the Second Army having a slightly greater distance to cover than that from Agpur. Reconnaissances along these lines had shown the presence of a Scythian cavalry screen of much greater density than had been thought possible, and the authorities at Ranjitgarh were realising that the Scythian attack by way of Iskandarbagh was at least as strong as that from Kubbet-ul-Haj, which they had previously considered to represent the enemy's main line of offence. The same facts were pretty well known in the city by this time, thanks to the enterprise of the newspaper correspondents. Those representing Indian papers had been muzzled with fair success, but it had been impossible to apply the same methods in their entirety to the representatives of British journals, and all the information which these, with painstaking and misdirected zeal, had been able to amass, was telegraphed back to India, reaching readers there only a day late. Hence the excitement which pervaded the seething streets of Ranjitgarh, and was reflected in the wards of the Antony Hospital.

Janie was in full enjoyment of a little brief authority at this moment. Sister M'Kay and one of her subordinates, preferring to trust to precautions of their own devising rather than to those recommended by people who knew the climate, had been compelled, very reluctantly, to go on the sick-list, with Major Saundersfoot's blunt remark, that they might think themselves very lucky to get off with two days' fever, to comfort them. Sister Lawson succeeded temporarily to the chief command, and Janie found herself in charge of a ward, in which half the patients displayed a tendency to believe that doctors, nurses, and orderlies were engaged in a conspiracy to keep them back from their regiments when their presence might

have turned the fortune of the day, while the other half were equally convinced that the same authorities wished to hurry them into the fighting-line before they were properly recovered. But four years' experience of native women and their male relations had left Janie little to learn in the management of difficult patients, and the orderlies, who had been a little inclined to reflect the contumelious light in which she was viewed by the Sisters, came to heel with gratifying celerity when they saw that she knew her way about.

Returning to her ward in the afternoon, after tea with Sister Lawson, she found three of the orderlies discussing some point warmly in the corridor outside, and as they saluted, asked them what was the matter.

"It's this way, Sister," explained one of them. "No one can tell us for certain whether the niggers have got some means of finding out what's going to happen, or not. I always heard as they could, but the corporal, he says you can't believe a word they say, and it's all chance."

"But is there any news?" asked Janie quickly. The corporal took up the word.

"I sent Private Noakes to the bazar about the extra bedsteads that didn't come, as you desired me, Sister, and he says the natives are all saying we've been badly beat. It was Manuel, the Goanese boy, went to interpret for him, and he heard what they were saying, and told him.

"A defeat? before Agpur?" gasped Janie.

"So he says, Sister; but what I says is, how do they know? It stands to reason that they can't have telegraphs quicker than ours, and what other way is there of getting news? There is no news, for I made an opportunity of going to the office and asking the clerk there just now, so it's quite clear to me that the niggers are just saying what they want, and not what's really happened."

"But ain't it true, Sister, that they do find out things faster than any telegraph?" urged Private Noakes.

"I don't know. Sometimes they seem to, and then again, I have found them quite wrong," said Janie. "And in any case, there would hardly have been time for a battle yet, would there—even if our troops marched early this morning? We can only hope the rumour is not true, and keep it from the patients. There is no need to trouble their minds."

She went on into the ward, hoping the patients would not read anything from her face. Noting one or two things out of order, she pointed them out to the senior orderly, and spoke to some restless sufferers on her way to her sitting-room, quite unaware that as she passed out of sight a murmur ran along the row of beds, "She's heard it too!" It was difficult to occupy herself in solitude, for she felt a strong sense of oppression. The glaring heat into which she peeped from the shaded verandah seemed to imprison her like a wall, and the hum of the great city which rose up round the compound—for the Antony School stood in an outlying district, not in the European quarter—had something menacing in it. What was happening round Agpur? She looked out at the statue of Sir James Antony, the great administrator who had saved Granthistan for England in the Mutiny, and wondered if he had known this restless impatience, this longing for any news, even bad news, in the days when he laboured knee-deep among his papers here, and all men's eyes were fixed on the Ridge at Delhi. She took up a book, tried in vain to read it, and manufactured an errand which would take her to Major Saundersfoot's office. He might have heard something. But if he had, he declined to reveal it. His hair, which had of late presented an aspect of calm, was again wildly rumpled, and he was writing furiously, and snapped at Janie for disturbing him, telling her that he knew what she had come for, but there was no news. Gathering that she was the fifth Sister who had appeared, with a more or less ingenious excuse, on the same errand, she felt considerable contrition, and returned to her ward. In the corridor, to her amazement, she met Sister M'Kay,

pale and walking with difficulty, but evidently bent on a tour of inspection.

"Oh, you shouldn't have come, Sister!" she cried, but stopped short, realising that her speech must sound like that of a clerk suspected of dishonesty who objects to show his books. "She might have trusted me a little!" she thought, and then something that Sister Lawson had told her rushed into her mind. Sister M'Kay was engaged to a doctor who was with the Second Army. "Has she heard anything? Oh, she mustn't know!" thought Janie, as Sister M'Kay, unable to speak, leaned panting against the door. "Take my arm through the ward, Sister, and come and rest in my room a little. The men will be so glad to see you back. Several of them have asked after you."

Sister M'Kay looked at her with something of suspicion, but was thankful to accept the offered help, and walked slowly through the ward, her practised eyes scanning everything. Once in Janie's room, she made honourable amends for her doubt.

"You have got the ward in very good order," she said, speaking with difficulty, as she sank into a chair. "I ought not to have felt uneasy, but I doubted whether you had experience enough to manage the men."

"That shows you must have forgotten the old days in Prince of Wales," said Janie lightly, as she poured out some lemonade. Evidently Sister M'Kay had heard nothing of the rumoured defeat, and to turn her thoughts to old times might prevent her hearing of it at all.

"In Prince of Wales?" with intense surprise.

"Yes, when you were junior pro. and I was senior, under Sister Wallace. Don't you believe me? Shall I tell you what your name was?"

"That might be guessed by any one," said Sister M'Kay stiffly. She could not be expected to regard the nickname of "Cayenne" as a compliment either to her appearance or her temper.

"Well, do you remember the day the woman went

mad in Queen Adelaide, and pulled the door off its hinges? Fairy and I were hanging on to her arms, don't you remember? but she simply dragged us along until you tore upstairs and met her just in time."

"Fairy and you? Why, you must be Jenny Wren, and I never realised it! Poor Fairy died in South Africa, you know—enteric. To think of meeting you here! Did you know me at once?"

"The moment I heard your voice," said Janie.

"Then why didn't you——?" Sister M'Kay stopped suddenly, and had the grace to blush. "I think you might have said something," she added, with distinct resentment.

"I couldn't; you were too frightfully unapproachable. But I knew it was all right, and it was only that you didn't recognise me. You had to be careful, of course. I might have been an utter fraud, and after your experience with the amateurs you were wary. But you will consider me fit to take charge of a ward now, won't you?"

"Indeed, I wonder you don't ask me to resign in your favour," said Sister M'Kay, with the peculiar solemnity which had always warned her associates in the old days that she was making a joke, and Janie knew that peace was restored. During the rest of the evening she had a task in hand that effectually prevented her from dwelling on her former anxieties—the guarding of Sister M'Kay from any one who might prematurely rouse her fears. In talking over their early experience, and discussing the fate of many who had been trained with them, the time passed safely, and Janie breathed a sigh of relief when she had seen her to her own rooms again. In the morning she came across Sister Lawson, wandering about irresolutely with a telegram in her hand.

"It is for Sister M'Kay," she said, "and I don't know what to do about giving it to her. There has been a dreadful disaster—every one is saying so—and what if he is killed?"

"I'll take it to her. We found out last night that

we were trained together," added Janie, as Sister Lawson looked at her in surprise—"before your time, you know. It wouldn't be right to keep it from her."

She took it, with much more apparent than real calmness, to Sister M'Kay's room, and found her sitting up in bed. She looked up in surprise at the intrusion, and Janie felt an insane desire to throw her the telegram and run away.

"A telegram? Give it me, quick!" cried Sister M'Kay, but Janie held her hand for a moment as she obeyed.

"Sister, I think you ought to know—it may be bad news," she faltered, but the envelope was torn from her hands.

"Oh, you silly Jenny! What a fright you gave me!" cried Sister M'Kay, with a hysterical laugh, as she displayed the two words, "Safe. Writing." "But there must have been a battle," she added, "or he would not have wired. And how long the telegram has been in coming!"

"Yes, it must have been all round by South India. I suppose the wires were blocked with Government messages," murmured Janie.

"Why, Jenny, I believe you are crying! I don't deserve that you should be nice to me. Do you really care?"

"I am so glad!" said Janie, with difficulty, and she kissed Sister M'Kay's cheek and hurried away.

But if all was well with the one man in whom the nursing staff at the Antony Hospital felt a particular interest, this was by no means the case with public affairs. All through the day and those that followed, reports and rumours came trickling in, alike only in their message of misfortune. The intended junction of the Second Army and the Granthistan troops had not taken place—this was the first tangible fact that emerged from the mist of uncertainty, but the reason for the failure was lost in excited talk of treachery, death-traps, and native risings. Then the ugly word panic was whispered, and there were those who said that

disgrace, and not disaster, was the proper epithet to apply to the proceedings of the day and night which had seen the Second Army repulsed from entrenchments of unsuspected strength, and the Granthistan troops, unsupported, and threatened with an attack in the rear, retiring in confusion on Agpur, only to be driven out by a popular insurrection synchronising with a Scythian advance. True, the fugitives had been rallied—rather because there was no way of escape than for any loftier reason, said the cynics—and were entrenching themselves hastily on the Agpur-Ranjitgarh railway, but the possession of Agpur not only brought the Scythians inside another line of the British defences, but gave them the command of the railway running north-eastwards to Nizamabad and Bihet.

The rage and dismay aroused in European circles in Ranjitgarh were extreme, and Janie found these feelings fully reflected in the conversation at the Thorpes' the next time she dined there. Most of Mrs Thorpe's non-combatant guests had been passed on to friends down the country, but a nucleus of uprooted district officials remained, and various stray officers dropped in to join in censuring fate. Mr Brooke and Arbuthnot were now both in khaki, wearing the badge of the Shikaris, which Janie inspected with great interest, and she learned that the only difficulty in raising the new corps was the embarrassing number of would-be recruits. "I did not know there were so many crack shots in all India," said Mr Brooke. The first company was getting well into its work, and was already employed in patrol duties round the city, and the second was working hard at drill. A third and a fourth would be added—if time allowed.

But would time allow? that was the question. The extraordinary succession of disasters was producing in some men's minds a fatalism akin to that of the natives. Of what use was it to move if we always moved just a little too late, to fight if we were always to be outmanœuvred, to possess the greater part of one army

still unbeaten and another only temporarily repulsed, if these were to be kept wholly on the defensive in their own districts? The antidote to this pessimistic frame of mind was the vigorous conviction that all the disasters were due to a general shirking of responsibility in high places and an infinite capacity for muddle, which was voiced with almost painful iteration by many of the Thorpes' guests. It was now well known, so Janie heard, that the Commander-in-Chief had entirely lost his nerve as a consequence of the attempt upon his life, and that this was the cause of his keeping the other commands of the First Army inactive in the anticipation of a general rising. But the real criminals were the British Government, who had first of all, owing to their non-interference in Ethiopian affairs, given the Scythians the opportunity to surprise us, had then forbidden the execution of the scheme for repelling invasion drawn up years before by Lord Williams, because this involved the violation of Ethiopian territory, and having condemned British India to defend itself in the plains, were now withholding the support rendered necessary by this policy. Where were the reinforcements promised with so much fervour by the Prime Minister amid the plaudits of an enthusiastic House of Commons? It was understood that the fear of native troubles in South Africa was sufficient reason for not denuding that country of white troops, but by this time a whole army corps, at least, ought to have arrived from home. What had happened to it? Parliament, having voted its twenty millions, had risen as usual, though an autumn session was believed to be inevitable, and no official explanation of the delay had been offered—or if offered, it was couched in language so cryptic as to make confusion worse confounded.

The Cabinet having been duly reprobated, the turn of inferior persons came. Our scouting was defective—that had always been said; our officers failed to act together; our Intelligence Department was

obviously in the habit of welcoming greedily Scythian legends specially prepared for its consumption. Our generals displayed a new timidity in taking risks, which left them at the mercy of a foe who had no such scruples, and this timidity was heightened by the fact that beside each general—like the emissaries of the Convention with the armies of Revolutionary France—rode the journalist, ready to guillotine him next day in the British press on the slightest evidence of an excess of zeal. Upon the journalist was heaped blame even heavier than that lavished upon the Government, but while the men present were vying with each other in instances of the harm he had done, there entered to them with dramatic propriety no other than Mr Cholmeley-Smith, very imposing in khaki and a war correspondent's badge, his cherubic face wearing a look of strenuous importance which suggested nothing so much as a small boy intent upon some specially attractive piece of mischief. As he was known to have been at Agpur, his calling was overlooked in consideration of the information he must possess, and he received a hearty welcome. It soon appeared, however, that he had come on an errand of his own.

"I want your help in rather a delicate matter, Arbuthnot," he said. "A question of great interest has arisen, and I owe it to my paper"—he spoke as if he was proprietor, editor, manager, and staff all rolled into one, said Mrs Thorpe afterwards—"to furnish the world with the means of forming a correct judgment."

"Do you mean that you want to see me alone?" asked Arbuthnot. Mr Cholmeley-Smith looked round upon the rest.

"No, I think not," he said, with something of condescension. "I may as well tell you that I have formed a strong opinion upon the subject myself, but when I broached it to General Harperston he was very much incensed—in fact, he became quite violent. Now I have the highest respect for Harperston's judgment

in most things, but I can't help seeing that he is inclined to be biassed in the case of a man belonging to his own profession. No one here is likely to be prejudiced either in Harperston's favour——" there was a little malice in his smile, but the smile faded as Mr Brooke's level tones assured him, "Or in yours, Smith. We will do our best to hold the balance even"; and he ended rather lamely, "At any rate, I should like to know what you think about it."

"All right. Fire away," said Arbuthnot, taking possession of Mrs Thorpe's writing-table, and preparing to make notes.

"The question at issue is the means by which the Scythians were informed of the intended junction of our forces in time to prevent it," said Mr Cholmeley-Smith. A murmur of protest arose.

"I say, you know, this isn't our business," said Arbuthnot. "Of course there'll be an inquiry."

"The public demands to know the truth now," was the dogged reply; "and it shall have it from me."

"Which means, I suppose, that if we don't help you to get at the truth, a choice selection of—terminological inexactitudes—will have to do instead. Well, go on, then."

"You know the situation the night before the advance," proceeded Mr Cholmeley-Smith, unmoved—"the Second Army at Dostabad, ours at Agpur, with the Scythian cavalry and ours scouting between us. Harperston had been in constant communication with Winhill at Dostabad, and it had been arranged that a simultaneous advance should take place the next day, the Second Army force starting earlier than ours, as having farther to go. That very afternoon it was discovered, from a prisoner, that the Scythians were reading our wireless messages. Of course it would have been possible to telegraph back here, then across to Bab-us-Sahel and Sahar, and so to Dostabad, but there was certain to be delay in getting the messages through, and who could tell but that the wires

had been tapped too? So Casterton—you know him?—of the Kunji Rifles, volunteered to ride to Dostabad. He had been stationed at Agpur before he was appointed to Shah Bagh, and knew the district well, and every one said he was the best cross-country rider in India. He was confident that he could elude the Scythian horse, but he was to wear uniform so as not to be taken for a spy if he fell in with them. He carried no message—merely the key of a new cipher very carefully concealed. Well, he started as soon as it was dark, walking out beyond the city, and having his horse brought to him there, so as not to attract attention. One or two of us walked down with him, talking and laughing, to make it look more natural. We have never seen him since, but before midnight the wireless messages in the new cipher began to come in. He had run the gauntlet successfully, and had fallen in with some of the Second Army scouts, who brought him to Winhill's headquarters. Winhill was full of fight, and proposed to surprise the Scythians by an attack before daylight. It was only putting things forward two hours or so, but it would just do the enemy out of the advantage they thought they had got by tapping our wireless. Harperston agreed, and they arranged times and so on, and Winhill mentioned that he was keeping Casterton as guide, since from a tree that he climbed to see where he was he had distinguished the Scythians working at fresh entrenchments by electric light. To get at them before the entrenchments were finished would give us a tremendous pull, of course."

"Why did Casterton need to find out where he was?" asked Mr Thorpe.

Mr Cholmeley-Smith smiled mysteriously. "Presumably he had lost his way in the dark. Well, at dawn we received a heliograph message, from a mosque close to where the railway crosses the road, that the attack on the entrenchments had been a complete success, and that the Second Army force was advancing on the main Scythian position. So we started.

We could hear guns on our left, and we wondered whether Winshill was in action already. But we couldn't get into touch with him, and our scouts brought word that the country was still swarming with the enemy's cavalry. When we came in sight of the Scythian position we settled down to wait while the guns pounded it a bit, for it was too strongly held for a frontal attack. But there was no sign of Wins-hill, and no more messages, and the men were suffering badly under the rifle-fire from the trenches, for there was next to no cover. Then the flood came. You may think it funny," with distinct resentment, "but the enemy had cut the canal-banks, and all the flat ground was simply like a lake. The men couldn't lie down any longer, of course, and when they stood up they drew the enemy's fire. We had to get back a little, towards the embankment over which our guns were firing. Of course there was a good deal of confusion, and almost before we noticed that the enemy's fire had stopped, their cavalry charged us. Some of us got out alive, some of us didn't. Those that did rallied near the guns. Then Harperston got a message, heliographed on from Agpur, to say that the Second Army force had been repulsed with heavy loss, and it was clear there was nothing to do but to retreat. Getting the guns across the flooded country, with the enemy charging wherever they saw a chance, was not exactly festive, but we got into Agpur somehow. Of course the men were demoralised—the loss of officers had been frightful—and the Tommies got at the drink-shops. Then quarrels broke out, and before we knew it there was fighting from street to street. I can't tell you what happened, because so many things were happening at once, but I know that the men who were still in hand were pitted against mutinous soldiers and the townspeople, and that the Scythians managed to capture our outpost on the hill overlooking the town, and get guns up there, while the fighting was going on. Then we had to quit, and we were thankful there was darkness to do it in."

"Well?" said Arbuthnot. "It's not a pretty story, but the facts seem fairly clear."

"Not when you take into account what had happened to the Second Army force. They were led into a trap—Magersfontein over again—a bare plain in front, commanded in a sort of semicircle by trenches and concealed guns. Happily there was no canal that could be cut just there, and the survivors lay on the ground all day while the guns did their best to keep down the enemy's fire, and drew off when it was dark."

"What is the question, then?"

"Who betrayed the secret of the new cipher? that is the question," said Mr Cholmeley-Smith triumphantly.

"I see. You think——?"

"That Casterton turned traitor, of course."

"For shame! A dead man—a British officer!" came angrily from the group round him, but he held his ground.

"What other solution is there, when you consider the facts dispassionately? Casterton reaches Dostabad—with the cipher, evidently, since messages arrive in it. But he must have let the Scythians see it on the way, so that they could continue to read what was sent. Then he leads the army into a death-trap, and disappears."

"The question clearly is, Did Casterton reach Dostabad?" said Arbuthnot. "Was there any one there who knew him?"

"Apparently not. But who else could have——?"

"Is it possible to get into communication with any one who saw him?"

"Yes, the 'Notice's' correspondent with the Second Army has answered my questions, and described him. Medium height, sunburnt, fair hair. He adds that he had a broken tooth in his right upper jaw, so far back that you could only see it when he smiled. Curiously enough, I cannot remember whether Casterton had a broken tooth or not."

"No, because luxurious amateurs like you have never

done police-court work," said Arbuthnot, with growing excitement. "Your colleague has, that's clear. Well, I don't know whether poor Casterton had a broken tooth, but I can tell you who has, and that's Alfred Brown—Alfred of Agpur, our friend George's brother."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr Cholmeley-Smith. "Why, he was with us in Agpur, representing the 'Leader of Men.' Their man got killed in a skirmish, and he offered his services temporarily, and was accepted as being on the spot. He is as different as possible from his brother, will never call himself anything but Brown——"

"Can you account for his movements that night?"

"He was one of those who walked down with Casterton to the place where his horse was to meet him. I saw him when we got back to the city next day," was the triumphant answer.

"But not since, I presume? He would hardly put his head into the lion's mouth again. I haven't a doubt that he arranged an ambush for Casterton, and then put on his uniform and took possession of the cipher. He would pass anywhere as a European—not like George. But it must have required some nerve to face the possibility of meeting some one who knew Casterton."

"I am sure," said Mrs Thorpe maliciously, "that it must be the greatest satisfaction to you, Mr Cholmeley-Smith, to have been the means of clearing poor Captain Casterton's character—even though you were the only person to accuse him."

"Allow me to thank you for the warning," was the suave reply. "I will not repeat the offence by aspersing the name of my friend Brown, at any rate."

"Convinced against your will?" said Arbuthnot. "Well, I don't suggest that you should gibbet him in the 'Notice,' but you won't object to my warning the proper people to keep an eye on him, I suppose? He will probably be discovered as a prisoner when we retake Agpur, in the hope of beginning his old games again."

"The danger is at least remote," said Mr Cholmeley-Smith musingly. An officer present pounced upon the words.

"Remote? You can't mean to suggest that there will be any delay in ordering up the rest of the First Army to support us and advance on Agpur, while the Second Army marches round through Khemistan to take the Scythians in the rear?"

"I am not in the counsels of the Viceroy," said Mr Cholmeley-Smith, with extreme mildness. "I can only go upon such slight knowledge as I may possess of affairs at home. The operations you suggest would require at any rate the possibility of reinforcements, I presume?"

"And the reinforcements are promised. Where are they?"

"Not on their way to India. I think I am betraying no secrets if I say that? I can't speak more plainly, but I shall be very much astonished if any troops are sent out this cold weather."

"Except the drafts—the reliefs?" with ill-concealed anxiety.

Mr Cholmeley-Smith shook his head. "I doubt if there will be any drafts. In fact, I should not be surprised if some of the troops now in India were to be withdrawn."

"Good Heavens, sir! do you know what you are saying? Why, in Heaven's name, why?"

"For home defence. England is more important than India," said Mr Cholmeley-Smith. "You will understand that this is not public property? I may have been indiscreet in mentioning it, but it will soon be known."

There was no more general conversation after that, for no one could trust himself to say what he felt in the hearing of Mr Cholmeley-Smith, whose air of being hand-in-glove with the Cabinet brought upon him inevitably the blame of being a sharer in their misdeeds, and the party broke up into angry and protesting groups. When Janie rose to go, Mr Brooke

detached himself from one of these, and asked if he might drive her back. She had wondered whether Arbuthnot would offer his services, but it seemed to her that he had been inclined to avoid her all the evening, and now he only walked down to the gate beside the cart.

"How well Mr Arbuthnot looks!" she said, when they had left him behind. "And he is going down-country for you, Mrs Thorpe tells me—to enrol some more recruits, I suppose?"

"So the world supposes, but"—and to Janie's intense surprise, Mr Brooke spoke in French—"he is really going north-east. He wished me to tell you."

"Not back to——?"

"Speak French, please, and mention no names."

"But is he going back to—where we came from?"

"If he can get there."

"Then I know why he kept away from me all evening! He didn't dare to tell me. He was afraid."

"It is quite possible. We will decide that it was so, if you like."

"If I like! He knows he ought not to go; you know it. Why, the journey alone is almost sure to kill him, and if he is caught——"

"You must remember that he will travel more safely alone than with a lady, and he will be differently disguised. The secret of the path remains his own, too. But don't think that I would have encouraged his going if I could have helped it. It is a matter, I may say, of life and death. Our rulers have got it into their sapient heads that the Scythians in Bala are intending to pour down by way of Nicha, and take us in the rear. This fear of being outflanked is getting into a mania. After all, I suppose you can turn any position—India itself—if you go far enough round. But of course the enemy are diligently spreading this rumour, and backing it with absurdly exaggerated reports of their numbers. Arbuthnot is to bring a trustworthy account of the force they have in Bala at present, and the possibility of their bringing

it over the passes into Nicha. He must go at once, before the winter makes it impossible. And you will be glad to know that, even if he cannot get to St Martin's, he is to make arrangements in Sheonath which will relieve Miss Weston from the pecuniary anxiety of which you spoke to him."

"Do you mean to say that he may possibly see my Burree, and he hasn't given me the chance of writing to her?"

"He can't carry letters. Even I have not written."

"*Even you!*" The words expressed such amazed bitterness that Mr Brooke could hardly restrain a smile.

"I beg your pardon. My claims are very new and unsubstantial compared with yours, are they not? Nevertheless, I should have ventured on a letter if it had been possible."

"Oh, of course Burree would have liked to get it," said Janie, with ungracious compunction. "But how you can let him go, taking his life in his hand——!"

"I can only parody Cholmeley-Smith, and say that India is more important than one man's life."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE POLICY OF CONCENTRATION.

SOME six weeks later, Mr Brooke and Janie met again at what Mrs Thorpe called privately her "free dinner-table." Ranjitgarh was full of homeless Europeans—officers, civilians, and missionaries—and prices had gone up almost as they would have done had the town been besieged. If Mrs Thorpe was ready to take in as many refugees as her house and garden could accommodate, her husband was equally prone to invite to dinner any friend he met who seemed to be down on his luck, and these were many nowadays. The time even of angry protest was past, and men's faces were set in a hard determination to bear the last and worst disgrace which they saw impending over them. Janie was the only person in the room whose eyes still held the light of hope, but she had the pinched, eager look of the woman who watches, and has long watched, for news. Her anxious glance met Mr Brooke as he came in, and asked, "Have you heard anything yet?" and he responded by an almost imperceptible shake of the head.

"But no news is good news," he assured her after dinner. "I am not saying this merely to cheer you. The Scythians take pains to blaze it abroad when they make an example of one of our spies, to encourage the rest."

"But the mountains—snow already in the passes!" murmured Janie. "And you know he was not properly recovered," trying bravely to make her interest appear purely professional.

"No, I know. It's very hard upon—us both, isn't it?" and his eyes as he looked down at her were so kind that Janie forgot to resent his having guessed her secret.

"Do you think he will really have been able to see——?" she began, resolutely commanding her voice. "Oh, who is that coming in?" she broke off suddenly. It was so cold that they were sitting in the drawing-room, and the step which she heard was in the verandah.

"I don't know. It sounds like—it is!" and Mr Brooke went forward without looking at Janie. "Glad to see you back, Arbuthnot. Good travelling?"

"So-so. I went to your diggings, and they told me you were here, so I came on—presuming on Mrs Thorpe's general invitation. I thought perhaps——" He had caught sight of Janie in her corner, and Mrs Thorpe's welcome was spoken to empty air.

"I have looked forward to this ever since I started!" he said very low, and for one moment the world held only two people, while her hand was in his. Then they awoke to realities again, and because she wanted to cry, and to laugh, and to sing, Janie said in a muffled but very proper voice, "I am so glad to see you back safe. And have you—have you—" in a gallant attempt to account for the emotion which she was quite certain must have been evident to every one in the room—"have you been——?"

"Yes," said Mr Brooke, who had rejoined them, "that's what I want to know. Have you seen——?"

"I have been to St Martin's, and I have seen Miss Weston," said Arbuthnot triumphantly. "She was so glad to see me that she didn't even object to my being disguised. And I have got"—an impressive pause—"no, not a letter; it wasn't safe; but a paper in her writing which was intended for you both and for her friends at home. No address and no signature, you know, and no details which could make trouble if it was captured. I brought it down in an amulet—I was selling them then—and of course the risk was that

some Scythian soldier, or other dangerous person, might insist on buying just that particular amulet. Here it is." He took out of his pocket a tiny leather bag, with a thong for hanging it round the neck, and cutting the stitches which held it together, produced a sheet of paper folded and refolded until it was only about an inch square. "Now, which is to have it? Is it to be ladies first, Brooke?"

"Certainly," said Mr Brooke, with admirable unselfishness; "if Miss Wright will let me have it before she leaves."

Janie needed no further permission, and settled down at once to unfold and read the paper, Mr Brooke glancing at her with a scarcely perceptible smile as he and Arbuthnot returned to the rest. Every one was full of questions as to the newcomer's journey and how he had fared, but he waved them aside.

"One moment first, please," he said. "I am all in the dark about the present state of affairs, but I can see that something pretty bad has happened. When I made my report to the Chief as soon as I got here this afternoon, he said, 'I wish you could have let me have it a month ago—not that it would have been any good, though.' He wouldn't tell me what was the matter, but only said, 'Ask Brooke, and let me have a written report as soon as you can. At least we can file it to shame them in the future.'"

"Then you confirm what we have said all along, that the Scythians have not enough men in Bala to do any special damage from that direction?" said Mr Brooke.

"We were wrong in one thing—in judging by the small number that had managed to get there before we left. Later on, when the passes were properly open, they were reinforced several times, so that they may have had ten thousand men there from first to last. Of course most of those went to form the force that occupied Gajnipur, but there is a strong garrison in Bala. In Nicha there are practically no Scythians at all—merely a squadron or two of cavalry, sent to give

colour to the rumour which frightened our bigwigs so much—and now that the passes from Bala are closed, no more can get there until the spring. But what has been done that might have been prevented if it had been known that the Nicha scheme was pure bluff?”

“What’s your latest information?” asked Mr Thorpe.

“Well, I know, of course, that we have made no attempt to retake Agpur, and that Bihet and Nizamabad have been abandoned. I found that out when I got to Bihet, and it was a blow. I had to get across the river as a mad fakir preaching a *jihad* against the English.”

“Hadn’t we enemies enough already?” suggested Mrs Thorpe.

“Ah, I preached with discretion, you see. I depicted the hardships and dangers of the holy war so vividly that though the audience shouted ‘*Din! Din!*’ lustily enough, I managed to choke off some would-be recruits. Well, I suppose the loss of Agpur would lead naturally to that of the country beyond the Tindar, and the Nicha rumour to the abandonment of the Nizamabad-Nicha line, but I don’t quite see what else we can do in the way of retreat unless we bolt behind the Ghara altogether.”

There was a moment’s silence. “And that is what we are doing,” said a man at last.

“What! abandon Ranjitgarh and Nanakpur?” demanded Arbutnot incredulously. An assenting silence answered him. “Then I am ashamed of being an Englishman!” he cried.

“The seat of government is to be moved to Farishtabad,” said Mr Thorpe. “Stores and so on are being sent down quietly already, and the gradual evacuation is to begin next week. At present it is believed that no inkling of it has got out, and I suppose they cherish hopes that none will until we are actually in full retreat, blowing up the railway behind us.”

“To abandon Granthistan!” groaned Arbutnot.

"What does it mean? Is there some spell upon us? The Viceroy is an honest man. What does he say to it?"

"It is understood," said Mr Brooke dryly, "that when he objected, he was asked how he proposed to hold Granthistan if it became necessary to withdraw the British troops, or the greater portion of them, from India. There seems no doubt that he answered by sending in his resignation, but has been induced not to make it public until they have got some one to take his place. And that they can't do. No one will take the responsibility either of carrying out the Government's policy or of holding on to Granthistan without reinforcements. One could wish the Viceroy had refused to gratify them by keeping his resignation a secret for the present. A change just now is very unfortunate, of course, but it could not have been so bad as the loss of Ranjitgarh, and it might have roused the country if they knew what was going on."

"But at least he has saved Khemistan," said Mrs Thorpe.

"To be sure; I forgot that," said Mr Brooke. "We keep Khemistan as a jumping-off place, from which we may advance again when the good time comes. I believe the home Government would have given up even Bab-us-Sahel if they had dared. One doesn't wonder at their preference for a Little England; it comes so much more within their powers of management."

"Then Cholmeley-Smith's doleful prophecies are actually in course of fulfilment?" said Arbuthnot.

"Yes, I will say that for the fellow; he knows his own party if he knows nothing else, and they are no match for the Emperor Sigismund. He has detached Pannonia from the Inter-Oceanic League, which makes his eastern flank secure, and now he is doing all he can to goad Neustria into declaring war on him. He is still nominally allied with Scythia, in spite of his failure to come up to the scratch this May, and Pannonia may be depended upon to keep Magnagrecia

in play till he has time to deal with her. That leaves Neustria without allies, for he regards America and ourselves as voices and nothing else—a very big voice and a very feeble one. We have enough sense of fair-play left to intend to land a striking force in Flanders to operate on the Hercynian flank if they violate neutral territory in invading Neustria, but our highest hopes don't rise beyond scraping together three army corps, while Sigismund can fling seventeen across the frontier on the outbreak of war. That's why they talk of denuding India."

"But what are they doing at home all this time?"

"Waiting upon events, in a state of stupefaction. They can't even summon energy enough to turn out the Government, for fear of getting another just as bad. You see, we have always been promised time to improvise an army on the breaking-out of hostilities, but it was an army for home defence, not for acting on the Continent, and our fleet is almost as helpless to touch Scythia and Hercynia as it was to help Armenia."

"And Xipangue?" asked Arbuthnot.

"Fully occupied at present, so far as we know, in the Far East. They have pushed the Scythians back to the railway, but they can't do more till the spring. Their fleet is about as superfluous in present circumstances as ours. But most people imagine that we are to hold on to the line of the Ghara with any native troops that remain loyal, until the Xipanguese have time to come and rescue us."

"Consoling to one's pride of race! Good Heavens! is it possible that Sigismund has jockeyed us into a position where we daren't move hand or foot?"

"You wouldn't have us precipitate a European conflict, with all its attendant horrors?" said Mrs Thorpe, assuming the portentous solemnity of Mr Cholmeley-Smith.

"I suppose it's just possible we might win. At present we seem to be losing everything without a European war. This cold season, now! The passes are closed, and the Scythians can't get reinforcements

—unless they have managed to complete their railway from Rahat to Iskandarbagh. No one seems to know whether they have or not, for of course their saying so is no proof. But even if they have, it must be very slightly constructed, and could easily be broken up, and I heard in Bala that the pretender is not to have everything his own way. Rustam Khan was not killed, after all, and now that most of his opponents are across our borders with the Scythians, he is raising his standard in the mountains. The new dispensation has not brought in the Millennium, you see, and the Scythians are not exactly loved either in Ethiopia or in Bala. I saw pretty clearly that if we came back to turn them out we should be welcomed. The Bala people recognise that we meant well, even if it didn't always quite come off, but the Scythians have treated them as if—well, as if they were Sarmatians, which serves them right, but hardly seems fair. I heard some things which sounded like the tales the old men in Granthistan have told me of the days before the English came. Well, here's our chance. Are we actually going to sit down and wait till the passes are open again?"

"You don't realise the beauty of a policy of concentration," said Mr Brooke. "You get the smallest frontier you conveniently can, and sit tight behind it. What happens outside doesn't concern you, but if your frontier is crossed, you fall back on one still shorter, the need of an army diminishing automatically with the reduction of your territory."

"We have men enough in India to conquer the Scythians, if we do it at once," said Arbuthnot.

"But when the European troops may be withdrawn at any moment? And even if we have the men, we have not the man."

"A new C.-in-C.?" suggested some one doubtfully.

"Our present man will go down to posterity as the finest organiser of defeat that England ever possessed," said Mr Brooke. "Not that I have much hope from any of the others. They are regarded with suspicion

as being tarred with Cooke's brush, and they know it, and that makes them afraid to assert themselves."

"Harperston?" suggested the previous speaker.

"Sir Hercules Harperston is the idol of the British regiments, on account of his care for their creature comforts," said Mr Brooke slowly. "In return, they don't grudge him his. But if we are to reconquer Granthistan, creature comforts will have to be left behind the Ghara."

"Then do you mean that there's no one? that we can never reconquer Granthistan?" cried Janie, rejoining the rest, her eyes bright with recent tears.

"That I don't know. It is always possible that a crisis may bring forward a strong man previously unknown. But if I had the power, I would fetch Williams out."

A chorus of protest arose. "Williams! he'll never be sent out again. What could he do?"

"Everything," said Mr Brooke concisely. "Williams in plain clothes and riding a polo pony would be as good as an army corps to us."

"Why, that's just what Burree—Miss Weston—says!" cried Janie. "She's longing for him to come out."

"Are you serious, Brooke?" asked Mr Thorpe.

"Why not? What are we suffering from at this moment? Is it loss of prestige? He has the prestige of a man who never lost a fight. An imagined lack of sympathy with the natives? They look upon him as a father. Want of recruits of good class? Every man that has ever served under him will turn recruiting agent. He is old, and he may be old-fashioned, but the young men have not made such a shining success of the new methods that we need reject him on that ground. If I heard that Williams was coming out, and that some scheme had been devised for supplying the shortage of white officers, I should feel hopeful again."

It was plain that the opinion of those present was by no means unanimous. The officers were naturally

indignant that a Mounted Infantryman—and a Volunteer at that—should suggest their supercession by a survival from Mutiny days, and it served only to increase their resentment that the civilians, after further discussion, all agreed with him. Lord Williams's advocates were accused of worshipping a name, of trying to put the clock back, and similar crimes, but his opponents relied principally on the indubitable fact that for him to come out again would be contrary to precedent, and therefore impossible.

The dispute was still raging when Janie took her leave. Arbuthnot drove her back to the Antony Hospital, and answered as many of her eager questions as time would allow—how Eleanor looked, and what she had said, even what she wore. The sick woman who had been the occasion of Janie's remorseful searchings of heart in the cave had really been suffering from small-pox, it seemed, and when Eleanor reported the fact to the Scythian authorities the hospital was surrounded by a cordon of troops, and none of the inmates allowed to leave, while provisions were placed on the ground before the gateway to be fetched in, as in the days of the Great Plague. Three of the other patients contracted the disease, in spite of prompt vaccination, and about a dozen other suspected cases were brought in from the outside, with the happy result that a general epidemic was prevented. The place was still in quarantine when Arbuthnot visited it, and he had only spoken to Eleanor from the roof, to which he had climbed by means of a wall, while she stood on the stairs below. Vashti and the probationers had worked splendidly, she assured him, and Miss D'Costa had been of the greatest use in keeping things going. They were all waiting hopefully for news of British victories, and their chief trouble was the sight of would-be patients turned back by the guards, and wailing hopelessly at a distance. Before returning to receive the carefully disinfected letter which he had volunteered to carry, Arbuthnot had managed to visit the Begum, whom he found living with the faith-

ful Barakat in a corner of her great house—much damaged now by repeated hostile visits—like two very small and withered kernels in a very large nutshell. All the servants had forsaken them, but the scribe Fazl Ali and his family remained faithful, and worked for them by day, and the old lady's spirit was as high as ever. The bulk of her hoards, so Arbuthnot suspected, was still undiscovered, and he found that she had helped Eleanor with money in times of special need. "For thy sake I did it, child of my heart," she told him when he thanked her, "and for that of the great ones who are dead. What have I to do with the foreign woman?"

"So that's the man?" said Sister M'Kay, who happened to be at the office-door when Janie reported herself.

"What man?" was the very natural question.

"*The* man, of course. I can tell you the exact day he went away, if you like. Oh, it's a shame to tease you, Jenny! You show your feelings in your face just like a child. Are you engaged?"

"No, of course not," said Janie hurriedly. "There's nothing of that sort. It's only—he was glad to see me, and I was glad to see him."

"Bless you, my child, haven't I been through it myself?" said Sister M'Kay, in a tone that implied she was far beyond all such weaknesses now. "I understand all about it. He's waiting to speak to you till the war is over, because he thinks something may happen to him. They always seem to imagine it's all right as long as they haven't actually spoken—I know. And really it's just the other way about, of course. One would much rather have the right—Oh, for goodness' sake don't cry, Jenny! There are so many things one would like to hammer into men, and can't. I know one, at any rate, who has a fit of remorse in every letter he writes because he asked me on board ship as we came out instead of waiting till the war's over. You're spared that, aren't you? Now,

don't cry. Do you know, I've got our route for next Thursday?"

"Oh, where are we to go?" cried Janie, dashing away her tears. The question was of vital importance to her.

"To Farishtabad. They've cleared out an orphanage for us. Seems rather hard on the orphans, but I suppose they weren't asked. The convalescents will go down to the coast, of course, on their way home. Two Sisters are to go in charge, but I am not sending you."

"Oh, thank you, Sister!" cried Janie gratefully, relieved of a horrible fear, for the Shikaris were to go to Farishtabad, she knew. "I can never thank you enough."

"No thanks to me," said Sister M'Kay, in her driest tone. "I want you as interpreter, you know. If these tiresome natives won't learn English——!"

She spread out on the table a beautiful and important-looking official document, which appeared to prove the existence of an omniscient brain at the office from which it emanated. At a given hour eight days hence the work of moving the patients from their wards into the entrance-hall of the hospital was to begin, and by a certain time it was to be completed. Waggon to the number specified by Major Saundersfoot in a certain requisition would appear at the stroke of a fixed hour, and to these the patients were to be conveyed by the hospital orderlies, working on an exact system. Sisters, servants, private and hospital baggage, would be duly accommodated in other conveyances; a cavalry escort, with additional horses for the waggon, would arrive (the time was specified), and a train would be ready at the station to embark patients and staff at a certain hour. No contingency and no detail seemed to have been omitted from the calculation, and yet it had the fault incidental to all forecasts that take it for granted human nature and the course of events will work with mechanical exactness.

On that Thursday, at a time long past the hour at

which the escort and the extra horses were to have appeared, a number of white-faced nurses were looking at each other in consternation at the door of the Antony Hospital. Under the portico were drawn up the promised waggons, with the patients duly packed into them, and on the sacred grass-plot round Sir James Antony's statue were picketed a number of horses, but only those that had brought the empty waggons, one to each. Outside the railings surged a crowd, drawn from the lowest depths of the surrounding population, jeering at the plight of the Europeans. Above their shrill insults could be heard a strident voice, and from their point of vantage on the steps the nurses could distinguish a weird figure with matted locks, raised on high above the crowd—a preaching fakir. His disciples were mingling among the people, sometimes beating tomtoms to emphasise their leader's words, sometimes adding suggestions of their own, the result of which was seen in repeated rushes that shook the railings. If they went down, there was nothing to check the mob from surging up to the portico.

Major Saundersfoot was doing his best for those in his charge. Three messengers had been sent off by different routes to find the escort and hurry it on, but none of them had returned, and—most alarming sign of all—the servants had deserted, leaving only two or three Goanese waiters, who were hated equally with the Europeans. All available weapons had been collected, including a number of rifles which had arrived with the Agpur wounded, but there were only two or three cartridges for each.

"Would you think of making a laager with the waggons, sir?" suggested a convalescent sergeant, who had made the surgeon's acquaintance in South Africa.

"What about their firing on us from the kopjes, sergeant?" and Major Saundersfoot indicated the roof and verandahs which commanded the whole compound. To the exasperated eyes which scanned

its outlines, the Antony School seemed to have been deliberately planned with the idea of rendering it impossible to defend. The flight of steps rising to the main entrance, and the space under the portico in front, were the only spots not exposed to fire from the roof, and they could be attacked from the front and sides, and lay open to an enemy in possession of the building, which was itself of far too great extent to be held by any but a large force. Major Saundersfoot and the sergeant walked about together, altering the position of some of the waggons, and posting the orderlies where they could fire between them, and it seemed as though they came to a decision of some sort. The nurses were told to remain at the top of the steps, and the doors behind them were made fast and guarded. They watched in much perplexity while the men with the rifles did something to the cartridges, and Major Saundersfoot and the sergeant walked out to the horses. They led out the surgeon's own charger, which was a joke among his fellows as being up even to his weight, and he mounted. A sharp order rang out, and a volley was fired, the effect of which was instantaneous. Cries and wailing filled the street, and the only idea of the crowd at the gate seemed to be who could run away fastest. A cry of horror broke from the Sisters, but the young surgeon who stood on the step below them, smoking a cigarette, smiled superior. "Only blank cartridge," he said. "Watch!"

Major Saundersfoot's great horse was dashing towards the gate, the sergeant running at the stirrup. The horse was pulled up about twenty yards from the railings, and the sergeant rushed forward to draw up the massive bolts and fling open the gate. Man and horse thundered out, and the sergeant slammed down the bolts again. The crowd had begun to perceive the baselessness of their panic by this time, and a threatening group tried to bar the surgeon's way. The wounded in the waggons raised a cheer as the great horse executed a flourish with his hoofs that

sent the assailants flying, and Major Saundersfoot's right arm descended heavily upon a man who tried to seize his bridle.

"Loaded whip," said the young surgeon. "Mounted policeman dodge is rather good, isn't it?"

The sound of the horse's hoofs grew faint in the distance, the sergeant walked slowly and stiffly back from the gate, disdaining to hurry, since stones and other missiles were pursuing him.

"Sorry we had to waste a cartridge, sir," he said to the surgeon now in command; "but there seemed no other way of getting the gate open safely. The rest we won't play with."

Another period of waiting followed. The crowd, emboldened and reinforced, were now deliberately attempting to break down the railings, advancing and receding at a word of command.

"When the railings go, sir? or when they get abreast of the horses?" asked the sergeant hurriedly, and a nervous man under a waggon fired without orders. The wounded over his head jeered angrily, telling him to give up his rifle to them, but the shot produced an effect. The next rush was longer in coming.

"When the railings go," said the surgeon breathlessly, but the brisk rattle of firing which answered him did not come from his own men. Along the street parallel with the railings came a khaki-hued line, and the many-coloured mob fled before it. The sergeant and another man raced for the gate and threw it open, and Major Saundersfoot rode in. The men in khaki were ranging themselves in line facing the hospital, so as to keep the whole street clear, and their leader and two others followed Major Saundersfoot. Janie, who was crying for no reason whatever, thought she must be dreaming when she saw Arbuthnot looking at her from the foot of the steps.

"Most happy thing!" Major Saundersfoot was saying, as he dismounted ponderously. "Brooke was patrolling the Lal Bazar, and had a whole company

in reserve inside the compound of the Madrasa. Now we can get on."

"Hardly without horses," said Mr Brooke, looking at the waggons. "Dismounted men would not be sufficient escort through the streets."

A dishevelled Goanese pushed his way to the front, in a state of excitement that made him almost unintelligible. "Me tell you, sar! Me know man—horses to rent! Him let dem go, but pretend bery angry. You seize dem forcibly!"

Without a moment's delay this friend in need was commissioned to guide the waggon-drivers to the side-street in which the stables of which he spoke were situated, and before long the waggons were leaving the hospital, followed by the tears and maledictions of the owner of the horses, who felt it advisable to delude his neighbours, though he had a pay-note safely concealed in his turban. Under the escort of the Shikaris the convoy reached the station safely, meeting on the way an irate official who demanded why they had not turned up at the proper time—leaving their train to block the line! It was not until the next day that the reason for the non-arrival of the original escort became clear. An attack on some waggons conveying treasure had caused the officer in charge to requisition the services of the guard which was on its way to the hospital, and in the subsequent street-fighting its proper destination was entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE HEART OF THE EMPIRE.

It was an autumn Sunday in a Sussex village, and the church-bells were ringing for evening service. The Squire's wife, descending the steps of the Hall terrace, and striking into a path that led by a side-gate to the church, was arguing rather nervously with one of the two men who followed her. It was obviously desirable for her husband and herself to go to church a second time, if only to set a good example, but it was quite unnecessary for her brother to feel bound to do so. Mrs Leighton was a woman with a conscience, which she was conscientiously determined not to impose on any one else. She admired her brother enormously, without in the least understanding him, and she was firmly convinced that he made a practice of ridiculing all she held dear. It was gratifying that he should have driven up in his motor-car the night before, and announced that he had come for a quiet Sunday, yet Mrs Leighton could not but detect irony when, in response to her sisterly inquiries, he confessed himself "sick of London—dead sick of politics—despairing of the republic." Such despondency, in a man who had placed himself, by means of a union of business capacity with the knack of finding the right literary instruments, at the head of the most powerful newspaper combination in the country, would be reprehensible even if it were genuine. Lawrence Irby had been hard hit, as his sister knew, by the untoward results of the General Election

which had brought Mr Cholmeley-Smith's friends into power, but the events which had followed it gave him an unparalleled opportunity for saying "I told you so"—such a chance as Mrs Leighton herself would have embraced with unchastened joy. Of course this shameful business about India was very trying—but what a splendid opening it afforded for attacking the Government! It was not as if Lawrence knew any one particular out there—in that case she could have sympathised heartily with him, as she did with her Vicar, who had not known for months whether his only sister was alive or dead.

"My dear Edith," Irby remonstrated at last, "have you any objection to my going to evening service if I wish it? I like your little church, I like your stolid people, and I like your Vicar. He believes in England still."

"What funny things you say, Lawrence!" Mrs Leighton's tone suggested that her brother evidently cherished doubts as to the solid earth beneath his feet. "I suppose you are thinking of the sermon this morning. Now I quite meant to speak to Mrs Weston about the way the Vicar drags public events into his sermons. I don't consider it reverent."

Irby looked at her with the humorous glance which always made her set him down regretfully as a scoffer. "Let him off this time, Edith. I daresay he has enough to bear without your disapproval. Any man who cares for his country is down on his luck just now. Why, this is quite picturesque—a sort of feast of lanterns! I didn't know you had so many people about."

"Oh, they come from the farms in the Downs, little places which you don't see until you are just above them, and you need a lantern to find your way along the sheep-tracks through the gorse. You couldn't explore our parish in a motor. The people know that the Vicar has had news from India at last, you see, and that's why they have all come out to-night. I don't quite know whether—— But

still, I will say for Mr Weston that when a family emigrates, or one of our boys goes for a soldier or a sailor, he keeps up with them all over the world, so it's only fair that their relations should show sympathy with him. I always say that if only more of his children had been sons, he would have emigrated himself, but what are you to do with seven girls on the prairie?"

The last words were spoken in a whisper as they entered the church porch, and a rapid movement of Mrs Leighton's head showed Irby the family in question, occupying the pew under the pulpit, and ranging from a self-possessed young lady in nurse's uniform to a child of eight. Their father, a grey-haired man with bright dark eyes, had attracted the visitor's attention by the singular impression he conveyed of smouldering fires under a calm exterior. This was a man of wide interests—so Irby judged,—a man who had once indulged also in wide hopes, but who had learnt to tame Pegasus to the service of a flock of quiet Sussex people buried among the Downs. "The first parson I ever heard read the State Prayers as though he meant them!" had been Irby's mental comment in the morning, and now something within him thrilled in sympathy with the tones of Mr Weston's voice as he read the prayer recently put forth by authority—and bearing the marks of its modern origin in every bald sentence—for "our brethren and sisters in the East," and announced that "After this service, in consequence of the late news from India, a meeting for prayer will be held in the schoolroom."

"Of course you won't come, Lawrence," said Mrs Leighton anxiously, when they were outside the church again. "I must go, just to show sympathy, but you and Robert can go home and begin supper. Two of the Vicarage girls will walk back with me, I am sure."

"But I want to hear the late news from India," was the reply, spoken, so Mrs Leighton felt assured, ironically, and as her usually silent husband roused

himself to protest that he didn't see why he shouldn't show sympathy too, the party from the Hall entered the village school together. The Vicar's wife, who had played the harmonium in church, was now with her daughters, the two youngest of whom were obviously almost crowded off their bench. The Squire, beckoning to them, made room for them on either side of him, and they informed him in ecstatic whispers that father had said they might stay up till nine to-night, to hear about Aunt Eleanor.

Presently the Vicar came forward to the school-mistress's desk, and heads were craned eagerly forward from the back benches as he unfolded a sheet of thin paper—the same that Arbuthnot had handed to Janie in Mrs Thorpe's drawing-room at Ranjitgarh. For many Saturdays, he said, his people had seen him bicycling into the town in the hope of finding an Indian letter, and had condoled with him when he returned without any, but here at last was one from his sister herself, not from the lady who had sent them news of her before. It had been brought down from Bala, at the risk of his life, by a British scout, whose commanding officer had written to explain why it was addressed to no one in particular and contained nothing of a personal character. They had often heard extracts from his sister's letters describing her missionary work, this one would tell them how the work had been brought to a standstill.

“MY DEAR FRIENDS,” Eleanor wrote:—

“We have had such a terrible disappointment to-day that now, when there is at last a chance of sending a letter, I can hardly write. All through the rains the Scythian doctor has told us of British defeats, and the evacuation of one place after another, but we did not believe him. I assured the people that reinforcements must be landing even then, and would push up-country as soon as the cool weather came, and every morning the children ran to the roof to watch for British hel-

ments coming up the road. But to-day we hear that it is quite true, and that even Agpur is gone.”—“She didn’t yet know the worst,” interpolated the Vicar.—“You all feel the disgrace and shame of it, I know you do; but you can’t tell what it is to us here. It is as if the world was suddenly turned upside down. The loss of prestige is bad enough, but what one feels most is the loss of the faith the natives had in us. In the hospital just now a woman, who must have been hearing the nurses talk, called me to her and whispered, ‘Miss Sahib, is it true that the Sarkar is put to flight before the Scythians?’ I said I was afraid so, and she told me that her husband, who once served in our army, had been holding out against his neighbours since the Scythians came, refusing to work for the soldiers or pay his respects to the General, and that the neighbours were very angry with him, saying that it gave the village a bad name. ‘And now he will have to give in?’ I said. She gave me such a look. ‘He has eaten the Sarkar’s salt, Miss Sahib. One night he will be found stabbed outside his own door.’

“It is real agony to think of the people who depended on us, and whom we have not been able to save. When Dr Weaver’s hospital in Sheonath was burnt on the night of the invasion, the mob killed not only the assistants and dressers, who were trying to save the patients, but even the patients themselves—their own people, not even Christians. Of the fate of our poor converts, scattered at the distant stations, and some of our missionaries who had not come in to the King’s Birthday festivities, one can’t write. The tales which reach us sound like the accounts of persecutions under the Roman Emperors. I suppose some people will say that missionaries and converts know their risks and take them voluntarily. But I think even they would pity the Europeans who have been prisoners since May, and are now in the common jail at Sheonath—for greater safety, so we hear. We imagine they must be kept as hostages, for the Rajah has given orders that they are to be taken up into the

mountains if a British force approaches Bala. They are nearly all civilians and ladies, captured by treachery, and besides all the insults inflicted on them, think what it must be for the men to see all their work for this country undone. Some of them have spent years here, improving the army, reforming the revenue system, introducing sanitary measures, and now the old corrupt officials have returned to power, the soldiers plunder everywhere because their pay is in arrears, and villages are depopulated because the people are taking to the mountains to escape forced labour.

“Dear friends, won’t you help us? I know you will pray—we should be ten times more miserable if we did not feel sure you were praying for us—but is there nothing else you can do? I hear you cannot send troops to India because you may have to repel an invasion. Is England sunk so low that she can’t protect her own people and help her friends at the same time? Our people have their own explanation of our inaction. One of the children said to me this afternoon, ‘Miss Sahib, when did Lāt Bilyān Sahib die?’ ‘He isn’t dead, Jinda,’ I said. ‘Oh yes, Miss Sahib. When the old hunter brought us that deer this morning, I was by the gate when he laid it down outside, and I heard the porter ask him why he bore signs of mourning. And he said he was sure that the Jang-i-Lāt Bahadar, his old commander, Lāt Bilyān Sahib, was dead, and the English were concealing it because they had no other generals, and they knew that men when they heard it would say all hope was gone.’ ‘Lord Williams is not dead, Jinda,’ I told her; ‘but I sometimes think that England is.’

“If England is not dead, then, won’t you try to get Lord Williams sent out to us? What does it signify that no one has ever come out again at his age, if he can save India? You can’t have the faintest idea how his name would rally the natives to us. And if you have no soldiers to spare, won’t the Colonies help? I don’t know how all the disasters have happened—it seems like a bad dream—but I do believe that Lord

Williams could retrieve them. You will back him up at home, won't you? If he will sacrifice his rest, and come out again in his old age, you won't leave him unsupported? That would be a worse disgrace even——

"I must let this go. Pray for us."

Mrs Leighton was agreeably surprised by her brother's intent demeanour while the letter was being read, but she became uneasy again when, after the prayers that followed, she was obliged to remind him that it was time to rise from his knees. It was disappointing, too, that he would not remain to be introduced to the Vicar and his wife, which would really have shown sympathy, but strode out of the school-room with his eyes fixed—on nothing, so far as she could see—passing, without noticing their salutations, the little groups of people who were talking eagerly as they lighted their lanterns. At supper he answered her remarks at random, and as she complained afterwards, she "got no sense out of him" until he said suddenly, "Can you let me have breakfast at eight to-morrow, Edith? I suppose the Vicarage people would be awake after that?"

"Why, yes, of course. The Vicarage?" said his sister confusedly.

"Your Vicar has given me a lead. I want to borrow that letter," was all that he would say, and there, under strong compulsion from her husband, Mrs Leighton was obliged to let the matter rest. Before nine the next morning the younger Weston girls, who were being instructed in physical drill by their eldest sister on the lawn at the side of the Vicarage, were thrilled with delight and excitement by the arrival of a motor-car at the gate. The eldest welcomed the visitor politely, and went to find her father, who was engaged with a parishioner, but the rest directed eyes of so much interest and longing at the car that the owner could do no less than offer to explain the working to them. In the course of the exposition they

became sufficiently confidential to ask him whether he knew Aunt Eleanor, adding the information that Nelly was training as a nurse that she might be able to go and help her when "that Janie" got married. Somewhat amused, Irby inquired who the lady thus stigmatised might be, and learned that she was an inter-loper whom Aunt Eleanor called "her child," to the prejudice of Nelly, her god-daughter. The younger sisters resented this hotly on Nelly's behalf, but anticipated for her an early restoration to her proper position, basing their hopes on the casual remark in one of Eleanor's letters, "I cannot hope to keep my dear Janie always with me."

"Nelly would rather have been a lady doctor, but father couldn't afford it, though Aunt Eleanor offered to help pay——" began the *enfant terrible* of the family, and stopped suddenly, confused by the glares and frowns of the rest, so that Mr Weston's arrival at the moment was opportune. He shook hands cordially with the visitor and asked him into the house, sending his daughters back to their drill.

"You must excuse an early call," said Irby. "I came about the Indian letter you read last night."

"You are the third person who has called this morning about the same thing," said the Vicar with a smile.

"You are early birds here, I see. May I ask who my predecessors were?"

"The first was our sexton, who brought me a sovereign from himself and his wife—taken out of the 'burial-money' they have been hoarding towards a grand funeral. It was to help to send out Lord Williams, and if more was needed, he would not say but another might be forthcoming from the same source. The second was Alfrey, one of the churchwardens, our principal farmer. He and a number of others had been discussing things as they walked home last night, in the light of ancestral memories of the invasion scare a hundred years ago. They are prepared to enrol themselves into a local defence corps, so

as to set free 'the soldiers' for being sent abroad. Not like the present Volunteers, you know, but the old style—nothing much in the way of marching, but roughly drilled, taught to shoot, and knowing every inch of their own neighbourhood. And if there is a call for more Yeomanry, he will send his second son, and provide him a horse, and his pay—but not five shillings a-day, I need hardly tell you."

Irby had listened eagerly. "I didn't come to you to get a good omen," he said, "but I see this thing is going to run. For months I have been preaching in vain in all my papers, advocating heroic measures, root-and-branch reform, and all the rest of it. Everybody approved, and there it ended; nothing was done. When the mail came in on Saturday, and I read the detailed accounts of the evacuation of Ranjitgarh, I felt absolutely sick—nothing else will express it—at being so helpless. As I was getting into the car to run down here, a curious old fellow came by—a Conservative working-man, with whom I have often had edifying conversations. 'Are we down-hearted?' said he. 'Yes,' said I; 'badly.' He took his pipe out of his mouth: 'Mr Irby, you've told us a lot what ought to be done, but you ain't once told us what to do,' and he lounged on. The distinction hadn't struck me before."

"Between a man's reach and his grasp?" asked the Vicar.

"Between transcendentalism and practical politics," answered Irby, with energy. "I am going to concentrate on getting Lord Williams sent out, and supported from home. It's quite probable that this will bring about other changes, but I shan't aim at them."

"No; we mustn't swap horses in crossing even this stream."

"True; but if your horse throws you, there's no law to prevent your mounting another if you can catch him. Well, may I borrow that letter?"

"For publication?"

"Certainly. It ought to reach a larger audience than your schoolroom will hold."

The Vicar hesitated. He was thinking of his wife, who would be certain to object to "making Eleanor so absurdly important." "I should not like my sister's name——" he began.

"There will be no need to publish any names. In fact, it might bring your sister into trouble if we did, for there are plenty of complaints of the Scythians having gained information from the English press. I can guarantee the genuineness of the letter, and produce it if necessary. In fact, I may decide to facsimile it at once, but that will be decided when I get to town. You will let me have it?"

Five minutes later, Lawrence Irby was on his way back to London, with the letter in his breast-pocket. His chauffeur, noting his eager face and fixed glance, opined that his employer had "come on a good thing," but was surprised to receive the order to drive first to the office of the 'Imperial Review,' instead of that of 'Man,' the halfpenny daily which was the first and favourite creation of Irby's brain. But Borrell, the editor of the 'Imperial,' was also concerned—no outsider knew to what extent exactly—in the management of an Imperialist weekly and an old-established high-class—even aristocratic—daily, and since none of Irby's many publications chanced to run on these lines of activity, there was scope for co-operation on subjects of national importance. Mr Borrell was discovered in a state of the deepest dejection, due to the perusal of his Indian mail, and it needed all his friend's determination to induce him to take any interest in the new scheme. But Irby was not endowed with what his admirers called a "Napoleonic" personality for nothing, and before long Borrell was eagerly asking questions and making notes.

"We are to work it together, then?" he asked.

"Absolutely simultaneously. If we can bring in the 'Thunderer' as well, so much the better. We want to touch as many people as we can, at once."

"The 'Thunderer'? Why!" Borrell had been glancing casually into a mirror that was suspended above and beside his desk at such an angle as to reflect the street below. "Hang the 'Thunderer'! Shall we let Critten in?"

"Like a shot, if you can get him."

"I saw him go into that tourist agency place opposite — sick of England, I suppose, and off to some 'cleaner, greener land.' But we'll find him something to do here."

"We will. This thing is going to run," said Irby again, as his friend touched a bell. A boy appeared.

"Bates, I want you to find a gentleman who went into the tourist office just now — dark pale man, spectacles, looks as if he knew a thing or two. My compliments, and can Mr Critten spare me a few minutes — very important."

The boy's eyes gleamed. "Mr Critten, sir? Yessir." He vanished.

"We are progressing," said Borrell. "Bates knows his name."

"If the office-boy of the 'Imperial' didn't know the name of the laureate of the Empire, who should?" asked Irby.

The lift was heard ascending, and presently the assiduous Bates, radiating importance from every pore, ushered in the desired visitor.

"Excuse a peremptory message," said Borrell. "You know Irby? We are a syndicate for saving India, with power to add to our number. We should like to add you."

"Understanding that India is one of the little things you care about," said Irby.

"And the way to do it?" asked Mr Critten. Borrell spread before him the notes of the previous conversation, and he glanced through them rapidly. "Williams to go out as Viceroy?" he said. "Good old Bills — maid-of-all-work to the Empire! Germaine as Commander-in-Chief, I suppose? But how in the world

are you going to impel the nation in the way it should go without compromising the men you want to do the work?"

"We shall mention no names," said Irby; "but if the public can't fill up the blanks in Miss Weston's letter it will be denser than I think. After all, you see, we are only proposing to voice what the man in the street has been growling for months. From the first appearance of the Scythians one has heard the same thing in railway carriages and at street corners, 'Why don't they send out Bills? He'd do the job.'"

"Yes," assented Critten; "when the country once takes a man to its great heart, it doesn't let him go easily."

"One has always regarded it as simply out of the question," said Borrell, "but now one asks with Miss Weston, 'Why?' If Williams can go, and will go, why shouldn't he? At the worst he can do no harm, at the best he can help us to look the world in the face again. But if the general sentiment is to have any practical result, some one must make it articulate, and until a heaven-sent leader appears to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm, we must do our little best. Irby looks after the man in the street, I have the clubs——"

"Where do I come in?" demanded the poet.

"You touch the conscience of the Empire," said Borrell.

"Brain want stimulating?" inquired Irby. "Take my car and run amuck down Fleet Street if you like. If the resulting emotions are satisfactory, the end will justify the means."

"Thanks, I rather think the brain is in an amiable mood to-day. But I suppose you both see that this rousing of the Empire isn't going to be done without clearing a good many worthy people out of the way?"

"We had a dim idea of it. It means Cooke at the War Office, for one thing."

Critten chuckled joyfully. "He said he would go there when he had the country behind him, and—Oh, may I be there to see that day's spring-cleaning! But armies don't spring out of the ground nowadays, even when Cooke stamps his foot, and we have played the fool a long, long time—too long. If Bills is to do anything, he must have proper backing. We can't afford to waste our sole remaining asset."

"There will be Colonial troops," said Irby, "and Cooke will rush things when once he gets to work. And—it's a bitter pill, but we shall have to make up our minds to bolt it—there is Xipangue."

"Hold India by the help of the Xipanguese!" cried Critten. "It can't be done. It's unthinkable. The Xipanguese would soon be holding India for themselves, and it would serve us right."

"It's got to be done," said Borrell. "We must get at the Scythian communications somehow, and how are we to wait until we can safely detach an army to do it ourselves?"

"Communications?" pondered the poet. "Ah, I see. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of Rahat, you mean? But that could be done without bringing the Xipanguese upon Indian soil at all. That's the dodge, of course. If they land at Haidar Ghat—Iran must be squared first, naturally—and march up-country, they will cut the Scythian line beautifully, and save our face. Save our empire, too, but that's one of the things over which we draw a decent veil. Perish self-respect, and let us get to business! You think we shall work things with the present House?"

"We calculate that it's just possible. The bye-elections have gone steadily against the Government, you know, and all their best men are pretty well disgusted. Then the one advantage of such a House as this is that it's specially amenable to popular pressure, which the country will supply fast enough when it's roused. There will be some resignations, I im-

agine, and probably a good many men will abstain from voting, but we shall do our best to keep the thing off the ordinary political lines. It is a national emergency, and I hope there's public spirit enough left in the country to support Bills and Cooke in clearing up the mess."

"And you think the Premier has backbone enough to adopt a national policy? He always does what his majority tells him, of course, but suppose the majority varies from day to day? How is he to know which is the side of the big battalions?"

"It's possible that he will be relieved from the necessity of deciding. Parliament meets on Thursday, which gives us three days for spade-work before Friday, when the Government will be asked if they propose to take any new measures with regard to the situation in India. Unless our success has been embarrassingly pronounced, they will say they don't, and after that I think the country will speak."

"You don't expect the other side to take office?"

"No good in this Parliament. Besides, Birmingham would not do it without a mandate for his policy. And we must have a strong man."

"And Forfar is a strong man gone wrong. Who, then?"

"Mentmore, I suppose. He would divide parties least, and the country keeps up a lingering belief in him."

"Yes, but he won't do it. If he had kept quiet hitherto, it would be all right, but he has denounced the Government on this very matter of India, and when he once begins to talk, he ends in talk."

"I suppose you have some one in your mind?"

"Yes, I have—Mulliner." The two journalists looked aghast, and Critten continued energetically: "Talk about riding the whirlwind and directing the storm—he has done it, and been worse rewarded for it than any man since Warren Hastings—or Frere. The country is yearning for the chance of putting him right, and here it is. Think of the sheer drama of it!

Oh, go on preaching up Mentmore if you like, but in case he fails you, hint at time's revenges, and the strong quiet man in the background. Then, when he is sent for, the man in the street will realise that he wanted him all along. And now, if you could find me a table and something to write on——”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN.

STRANGE rumours began to reach the fugitives at Farishtabad and the other cities of refuge behind the line of the Ghara—rumours of a remarkable stirring of feeling at home. One Tuesday morning the ‘Thunderer’ had printed a poem by Mr Bulstrode Critten, which had evidently caused searchings of the editorial heart. In a leading article admirably adapted for future use as a proof either of hearty encouragement or regretful deprecation, the ruling powers explained that while they must not be understood to associate themselves with Mr Critten in what they conceived to be the suggestion conveyed in his verses, they were far from wishing to condemn it unreservedly. Puzzled readers rubbed their eyes, and demanding angrily what the thing meant, sought enlightenment from other journals. In the pronouncements of ‘Man’ and the ‘Courier’ they found no ambiguity. Eleanor’s letter appeared in facsimile in both, with startling blanks where she had written Lord Williams’s name, and the leading articles emphasised its teaching with sledgehammer strokes. The ‘Daily Notice,’ which had unfortunately published only that morning a moving account of the evacuation of Ranjitgarh from the pen of Mr Chomeley-Smith, whose literary and historic sense had for once obscured his point of view as a politician, brought out a second edition for the express purpose of pronouncing Eleanor’s letter a clumsy forgery, and reproducing its Indian correspondent’s communication

in a severely edited state. Irby countered this by exhibiting the letter itself, with Mr Brooke's accompanying statement, at the office of 'Man,' and reprinting the most telling portions of Mr Cholmeley-Smith's article as the testimony of a Radical who dared to be honest. The street outside the office was almost impassable, and the premises of an enterprising firm of gramophone-makers, one of whose instruments reproduced Critten's poem, "The Roll of Heroes," as hastily committed to memory and recited by a popular actress, were so closely besieged that the police stopped the performance. The excitement grew as the day wore on, and reports of similar proceedings arrived from the provincial towns represented on Irby's newspaper combination, and at night the places of entertainment, the receipts of which had suffered of late, owing to the prevailing uncertainty and depression, drew enthusiastic crowds by announcing recitations of "The Roll of Heroes."

The Indian papers were not to be lightly moved by this wave of belated sentiment. The 'Pen and Sword,' with pained reluctance to accuse a contemporary of such foolishness, remarked that one could almost believe 'Man' was actually advocating the sending-out of Lord Williams, while the 'Pathfinder' referred sardonically to the periodical interest of the British public in India, and its invariably unfortunate results. Both professed entire scepticism as to the persistence of the agitation, but by the end of the week keen observers began to note preparations for a hasty descent from this pedestal of incredulity. The excitement had not died down. On the contrary, all the shame and resentment produced by the events of the past few months, and pent up because an exhibition of them seemed useless and undignified, had suddenly broken bounds. Hastily summoned indignation meetings in every parliamentary division proved inadequate to accommodate those who wished to attend, and crowds gathered in the streets outside to pass resolutions simultaneously with the crowds within. Greater

portent still, to those who had eyes to see, was the movement which sprang up all over the country, as spontaneously as it had originated among Mr Weston's Sussex farmers, in favour of manhood training for home defence. When Parliament met, it was felt that there was electricity in the air, but the Government appeared to be unconscious of it. In answer to questions, the Prime Minister announced that there was no change in the intentions of the Cabinet, and he enlivened the occasion with a display of humour of such exceeding pawkiness that even the youngest and most solemn Under-Secretary present was moved to laughter. The Secretary for War pointed out that his plans for securing the ideal army and an adequate reserve had not yet had time to mature, and alluded with benevolent sarcasm to the new "Defence Clubs."

Notice was given of a vote of censure, but the Opposition made no attempt to move an adjournment, and the House rose in good time. Outside, in spite of the hour and the foggy autumn night, a crowd was waiting. Such a crowd had waited night after night of the summer session, sullenly ruminating the news of fresh disasters and the Government's assurances of its inability to act. That crowd had been silent, but this one was articulate. As the first Minister appeared, a storm of groans and hisses broke out, which was renewed for each of his colleagues, and redoubled in strength for the Premier. The crowd had its humorist—as every London crowd must—but his sole contribution to the gaiety of the occasion was a reference to the lamp-posts in Whitehall, which did not seem to appeal to the persons to whom it was addressed. It was a crowd impartial in its antipathies, for certain members of the Opposition were reminded of past activities and inactivities which they had fondly believed forgotten, principally in connection with the army, while some few men on both sides were greeted with a rousing cheer. There was a disposition to escort the Prime Minister home to Downing Street, which was frustrated by the police, and the crowd

dispersed peaceably, with cheers for the absent Lord Mentmore, who had been smiting the Government hip and thigh at an indignation meeting in the Midlands that very evening.

The 'Daily Notice' talked of "Tory rowdies" and "Brummagem hooligans" the next morning, and the insulted Ministers expressed to interviewers a lofty contempt for the demonstration of which they had been the objects. But the Vote of Censure, a grim reality not to be pooh-poohed, came on, and had to be met. For once the accustomed pliability of the Cabinet seemed to have deserted them. They faced Parliament and the country impenitent and unashamed, glorying, as one indignant critic on their own side put it, in having had the moral courage to run away. In a few elder men, philosophic Radicals all their days, this attitude was natural and unconstrained, in some of their juniors it became noisy and defiant, but in no case did it placate their accusers. Long-standing rumours of internal dissension were confirmed when three members of the Ministry walked out of the House without voting, and their example was followed by an alarming proportion of the rank and file. Others, having explained their proposed action with due solemnity, supported the Vote of Censure, which was carried by a sufficient majority, and followed immediately by the resignation of the Prime Minister. The next few days were largely filled with talk. The Whips of the defeated party related their herculean efforts to bring their men into action, and the indifference with which they had been met, while the Opposition papers accused them of riding for a fall. Some conscientious members who had voted against their party resigned their seats forthwith, others ran down to justify themselves to their constituents, and others, again, defied them. Rumours of all kinds were rife, but in season and out of season the knot of papers influenced by Irby and Borrell kept to the front the need of the time—a National Ministry for the National crisis. Bitter disappointment chilled many aspiring hearts when it

became known that both Mr Forfar and Mr Birmingham had declined to form a Ministry, though promising their hearty assistance to any leader who could obtain the support of the existing House of Commons, but this was forgotten when the Earl of Mentmore was summoned to Windsor. Cheering crowds attended him when he passed through London, and the general public hung on the reports of his movements, his *pourparlers* with other politicians, his looks and his most casual words, with far more eager interest than had been roused by the fighting in India. But the situation was beset with difficulties. A General Election was out of the question at the moment, yet the House of Commons was almost ludicrously unreliable, and Lord Mentmore possessed something of the intolerance of genius in dealing with obstructive human nature. After days of inconclusive negotiation, he made the great refusal, losing thereby the chance of going down to posterity as the man called by the Empire to save the Empire.

This was the critical moment to which Irby and Borrell had been looking forward since Critten's warning. No one could say that this new blow, which plunged the unreflecting into despondency, had not been foreseen by them, for their veiled prophecies of it leaped suddenly into prominence. The men who read their papers assumed an attitude as of seers justified by the event—"Told you all along that Mentmore was no good. Now for the dark horse!" The campaign was by no means confined to the press. There were innumerable wires to be pulled elsewhere, interests to be conciliated, malcontents to be silenced, before the quiet man whose face was scarcely known to the politician in the street could be inducted into the post of honour and peril. Lord Mulliner was in a sense a man who had nothing to lose. He had held the helm in Greater Britain through years of peculiar difficulty and stress, and had been rewarded after his return home with ingratitude even more callous than that usually meted out by imperial England to her

proconsuls. It is hardly too much to say that he was relied on to accept office because he had suffered so much already that no worse could befall him. Yet there were still certain pledges to be obtained and guarantees to be given before he could come forward with any hope of success, and it was here that the value of the promise given by the leaders of the former Opposition appeared. In order to bring the crisis speedily to an end, as little change as possible was to be made in existing arrangements, and those members of the former Ministry who were willing to throw in their lot heartily with the new Cabinet were continued in their posts. Some changes were inevitable, notably in the India, War, and Colonial Offices, but the vacancies were filled irrespective of party. Lord Mulliner's was undeniably an emergency Ministry, but in its constitution it represented a movement towards the ideal long beloved by the finest intellects of the nation—the holding of each post by the best man for that post, whatever his political opinions. That it needed all the support it could receive, whether from idealists or practical politicians, will be evident when it is remembered that with a notoriously impracticable and unruly House of Commons, its mission was to recover Granthistan and end the war in India, and on the continent of Europe to put an end to the intolerable terrorism exercised by the enterprising monarch of Hercynia by means of his military strength.

For the moment little could be done except in the way of preparing the ground. Lord Cooke, welcomed to the War Office by acclamation, could not extemporise armies at a word, and Lord Williams, taking up at an advanced age the task of representing his sovereign in India, had to face a melancholy record of wasted resources and diminished prestige. Indian credit had suffered disastrously, and that of Great Britain had been appreciably affected, though an immediate improvement was observed in both from the day that Lord Mulliner accepted office. While

the Hercynian war-cloud still threatened Neustria, there could be no question of sending to the East the troops which might be needed at any moment, since the Emperor Sigismund had for several years past exercised his army in warlike operations during winter, with the express object, it was believed, of throwing his forces across the frontier in a season when invasion was usually considered impossible. Of the troops in India, the Granthistan force, as an army, was practically annihilated, and the Second Army had suffered a severe check, while the loss of warlike stores had been enormous. Even more appalling was the lack of white officers. At the best of times, the number of these allotted to native regiments had been considered by competent authorities to be too low, but now, after a single campaign, the supply of qualified men was almost exhausted.

The emergency Ministry was bound merely to produce emergency measures at first. Pending the success of earnest efforts to dissipate the Continental menace, Lord Cooke at home and Lord Williams in India were to devote themselves to building up the British and Indian armies respectively. There was no hope now of utilising the cold weather to drive back the Scythians once for all, since some months, at least, would be needed to prepare transport and reorganise the broken regiments behind the line of the Ghara; but Lord Williams hoped to be able to move early in the new year, long before the passes would be open for the arrival of fresh Scythian reinforcements by way of Kubbet-ul-Haj or Bala. The remains of the First Army, no longer held inactive for fear of a native rising or a Scythian descent by way of Nicha, would be available to take part in an advance from the Ghara; while the Second Army, strengthened by Colonial troops and any reinforcements Lord Cooke might be able to send out, moved northwards from Sahar in Khemistan. Its duty would be to relieve Shalkot and unite with the Ethiopian supporters of the resuscitated Rustam Khan, the

joint force then striking at the Scythian communications, and acting in support of the Xipanguese army, which might be expected to be marching up the Iranian border towards Rahat. When this plan of campaign had been roughly decided upon, the way was clear for inviting the Colonies to despatch contingents to India, and for projecting such an increase of the army at home as might enable, at any rate, the ordinary drafts to be sent out. It is probable that Lord Cooke would not have chosen war-time as the ideal period for cleansing his Augean stable, but the crisis had its advantages in that no one ventured to resent his short sharp methods. The critics went on criticising, of course, and there were many questions in the House of Commons, but there the War Minister was represented by an imperturbable Under-Secretary, with a gift of singular portentiousness of mien, who put off till the Greek Kalends, with extreme politeness, the answering of awkward inquiries, in the interests of the public service. The measure which attracted most criticism was Lord Williams's appeal to retired officers who had served in India to return to the army for the period of the war. Bills wanted his own men about him, it was said, and many doleful pictures were drawn of the confusion to be produced by a sudden influx of officers of the old school into a modern army—with side-references to South American forces, in which the lowest rank was that of Colonel. Even those who thought the idea in itself a good one, doubted whether, after the experience of the South African War, the veterans would respond to the appeal, but the veterans showed no hesitation. They responded in embarrassing numbers—men who had left the army on marrying because their wives disliked India, and found that they themselves liked England even less, stern critics of the War Office from Pall Mall and Piccadilly, sunburnt country gentlemen, terrible to poachers. Provincial towns lamented the loss of their most active citizens, suburban golf clubs of

their best players, harassed clergy of their factotums. One bishop calculated that the number of aggrieved parishioners in his diocese had suddenly diminished by seventy-five per cent. 'Punch's' cartoon of "Colonel Bogey returning to the Wars," achieved in a week the status of a national treasure.

It was not, of course, possible to find employment for all the veterans, for some were too old, some out of health, and some had forgotten their Hindustani beyond power of recovery. But those who were perforce condemned to stay at home were reminded that they might find work in organising the Defence Clubs, which were now to be encouraged instead of being snubbed, of their districts, and all concurred in the principle that only picked men ought to be sent out, though each man thought privately that he ought to be one of those picked. A curious phenomenon attended the arrival in India of the officers ultimately chosen. Those favoured subalterns who owned respectable, responsible, experienced bearers, became aware of an extraordinary mortality in the families of these attendants. Bearer after bearer deplored in heartrending terms the death of father or mother or other near relative, which compelled him to quit the Sahib's service and go to settle the affairs of the deceased. It was not until the deluded employer met his faithless servant, perhaps months afterwards, in attendance on an elderly gentleman whose countenance had not yet lost its healthy English tan, that he realised he had been forsaken in obedience to a prior claim.

Lord Williams himself sailed for India as soon as the necessary formalities could be completed, and meeting his retiring predecessor at Bombay, learned from him many unpalatable details of the existing state of things. A hurried railway journey to Calcutta, and a brief sojourn there, enabled him to put himself *en rapport* with the various departments of government, but no one was allowed time to forget that he had come out as a soldier, though occupy-

ing a civil post. Calcutta enjoyed only a fleeting glimpse of the small alert figure and sunburnt face, so resolutely patient of the viceregal splendour detestable to the man, and revenged itself by retailing a story to the effect that the visit had been undertaken purely for the purpose of inducing the incapacitated Commander-in-Chief to resign. At first moral suasion was the only means alleged, but the appetite for details grew with what it fed upon, until it was known in civilian circles all over British India that the Viceroy had enforced his arguments with the gentle compulsion of a loaded revolver. The veracious information was added that the extraordinary speed with which Sir James Germaine was gazetted Commander-in-Chief, and sailed to take up his appointment, was due to the fact that the announcement was already in type, and the General himself encamped on the wharf, off which lay his steamer with her fires banked. Farishtabad was appointed as the meeting-place of the Viceroy and his new Commander-in-Chief, and Lord Williams proceeded to inspect the cantonments lying between Calcutta and that place while awaiting General Germaine's arrival. Sir James Germaine, on his part, paid hasty visits to the Khemistan stations on his way up the country, so that the two leaders, when they met, had a personal knowledge of their whole line of defence.

Farishtabad was much excited on the day of Lord Williams's arrival. As an arsenal and large cantonment, the town was well accustomed to military spectacles, and of late it had overflowed with troops of all arms and supplementary forces of all kinds, but never before had it enjoyed such a *tamasha* as this. The Jang-i-Lāt Sahib, who had already arrived, was to meet the Bara Lāt Sahib at the station, and escort him to his quarters, and crowds of spectators were pouring in from all the country round. The Antony Hospital—still so-called, though it was now in possession of the Friends' Orphanage—occupied

a commanding position on the line of route, and the patients were making strenuous efforts to qualify as convalescents—for that day only, if necessary. The convalescents were to be allowed as far as the bank at the edge of the road, while the patients must be content to watch from the verandahs, or even the windows—hence the sudden return to health. Nurses, doctors, and orderlies had their hands full in regulating the eagerness of their charges to “give old Bills a cheer,” each man being convinced that without his assistance the Viceroy’s welcome would be appreciably lacking in warmth. Janie was in charge of one end of the line of dressing-gowned men at the side of the road, and derived much useful military information from their criticisms of the troops who were arriving to keep the route. Presently Mr Brooke rode up, on his way to the station, and stopped to speak to her.

“Have you seen Arbuthnot lately?” he asked, as they stood out of earshot of the convalescents.

“Not since Sunday—” with a sigh of which she was unconscious. “I used to see him fairly often, but lately he has never seemed to come this way.”

“It is not his fault—except that he has found his present piece of work for himself. He is stalking a preaching fakir, whom he saw when he was at Bihet, stirring up the people against us. As soon as he spotted him here, he felt sure he was up to no good, and asked me to set him free to shadow him. I have seen him once or twice, but he doesn’t seem to have discovered anything suspicious about the man so far. Of course he goes about his work in disguise, and I daresay you have seen him oftener than you think.”

“Oh no, I am sure I should know him,” said Janie.

“I assure you he has taken me by surprise several times.” But Janie’s smile continued to be a little superior, and Mr Brooke’s eyes twinkled. “Well, I must be going on,” he said. “You have a splendid view from this bank. Why, there is the fakir himself

—the very man I was speaking of—just opposite you, with a brother in the craft, I presume.”

“They don’t seem very brotherly,” said Janie, watching the two wild figures from her point of vantage. Both had matted hair and ragged beards, and each possessed a tattered square of some sort of carpet. The bone of contention was a specially desirable spot on which each wished to establish himself, commanding an excellent view of the road. It appeared that the fakir Mr Brooke pointed out had pegged out a claim by laying down his carpet, but that during his temporary absence his antagonist, who was distinguished by wearing a leopard-skin over his shoulders, had removed it and substituted his own, on which he took up a strong strategic position.

“Two of a trade, I suppose,” said Mr Brooke, as a policeman, attracted by the deeply interested crowd which had gathered round the shouting and gesticulating forms of the two holy men, executed rough-and-ready justice by restricting each complainant to half the coveted space, making them fold their carpets in two. “If I didn’t know that Arbuthnot has the matter in hand, I shouldn’t feel quite comfortable. That quarrel might only be a blind.”

He mounted and rode away, and Janie returned to her convalescents, some of whom were inclined to be uproarious in their excitement. For the first time for many months, hope seemed to be in the air, and the men who had faced disaster silently with set faces were cracking jokes and chaffing the passers-by. To Janie’s reproof they responded with a promise to “be’ave just like Sunday-school,” and varied their former occupations by alleging that they heard the train arriving at an impossible time and distance. At length the thunder of the salute announced the Viceroy’s arrival, and presently the blare of martial music heralded his approach. Janie, whose feminine weaknesses were a perpetual annoyance to her, found her eyes overflowing with tears as she watched eagerly for the great man on whom so many hopes were fixed.

It was not merely Lord Williams, darling of his country though he was, that she was expecting; in his small soldierly form the spirit of England was incarnate to-day.

Music, cheering, the last lingering guns of the salute, a blaze of gold and colour and a vision of haughty giants impassive on huge horses—then the carriage and its two occupants. It had not struck Janie before that the Orphanage was on the wrong side of the road, and she dashed the tears from her eyes and leaned forward anxiously lest her view of Lord Williams should be intercepted by the larger figure of the Commander-in-Chief. There was a sudden confusion, the carriage swerved violently, a woman's scream rang out—Janie did not know that it was hers—two struggling figures with matted hair which had risen into prominence for a moment, as if on the crest of a wave, were engulfed again in a sea of khaki, the Viceroy stood up in the carriage, turning this way and that in reponse to the wild burst of cheering which rose and ebbed and swelled again, and passed on amid renewed cheers.

"Drink this, Sister. Better now?" said Major Saundersfoot's voice, and Janie discovered that she was lying on the ground behind the excited convalescents, who had no thoughts to spare for her.

"Did I faint?" she asked in astonishment. "Oh!" struggling up, "somebody tried to murder Lord Williams!"

"Yes, it was a fakir—an evil-looking beast just opposite. He slipped between two of the troopers and jumped on the step of the carriage. But there was another fakir close to him, and he was after him in a minute—threw his arms round him and dragged him back before he could strike. Curious-looking fellow the second one was—some new kind of ascetic, I suppose. His back was scored with the most awful scars— Now, Sister," sternly, "pull yourself together. There's nothing in that to make you faint again."

Janie smiled feebly, and allowed herself to be helped

to her feet. She understood now the twinkle in Mr Brooke's eye. The convalescents, still talking eagerly over the event which would provide them with an enthralling subject of conversation for days, turned to impart the latest news.

"It were a poisoned dagger, Sister—a long thin thing not much bigger nor a skewer! They say one scratch——"

"But the second man—was he wounded?" Janie managed to ask.

"Not he, Sister! He wrap his left arm in the leopard-skin he was wearing—I see him in it before it all happened—and it turned the blade. It were some of the Shikaris rescued of him when he were on the ground, and cut down the big fellow. He fought like a cat, he did, striking out all round him, so's they couldn't take him alive."

Janie tottered back to the house, to be received with scorn but treated with extreme solicitude by Sister M'Kay, who ordered her promptly to go and lie down. This was fortunate, in that she escaped the knowledge of the rumour which spread over the town that evening, and caused moralising newspapers to inquire with virtuous disgust whether England was absolutely unable to protect those who served her. The fakir to whose promptness and courage the Viceroy's escape from assassination was due had mysteriously disappeared, and it was soon recounted as a circumstantial fact that he had been made away with by associates of the would-be murderer. The fact that no inquiry was ordered as to the means by which he had been lured from the safe-keeping of the Shikaris was much commented upon, especially among Regulars, but merely as an example of the general slackness to be expected from Volunteers.

Late that evening Arbuthnot, in his Shikari uniform, hurried into Mr Brooke's quarters. "Thought I should find you up still," he said.

"Presumably," replied Mr Brooke, with his slow smile. "Well, did you see the great man?"

"Rather! One doesn't wonder at the way they talk about him, you know. He's really—well, he's awfully decent. Asked me what I should like done for me—commission or anything of that sort. Had to tell him I didn't think I was cut out for regular soldiering, but hinted that if he wanted a scout—— And what do you think he said? 'I want a man to undertake a most important mission at once. Will you go? I hear good accounts of you on the Bala side.' I jumped at it, of course."

"And you think it means——?"

"I should say it means getting through to Ethiopia to find Rustam Khan and arrange for his co-operating with us. Can you think of anything better?"

"Well," said Mr Brooke deliberately, "if you do go, I must beg that you will explain things to Miss Wright yourself this time. I absolutely decline to do it again."

"But I was counting on you to look after her."

"When you are gone, if you like. But not being cruel, I hope, by nature, I fail to see why I should be pitched upon to make things worse for her, when you might impart comfort simultaneously with breaking the news."

"But I can't ask her to be engaged to me before I go. When I come back, I ought to have a position to offer her."

"Oh, of course, if you think position is all she cares for, you are quite right to wait."

"Nonsense!" said Arbuthnot, flushing. "I have no right to think she cares for me at all—at least, I mean, she has never said so." His cousin regarded him with the utmost gravity, and he hurried on: "There are about seven chances to three on one's getting through, you know, and it doesn't seem fair to set her watching and fearing and——"

"And you think she won't watch and fear unless you speak to her before you go? My good Jock, if you don't speak you rob her of the one piece of comfort possible to her. If it comforts her to believe she is

acting heroically in letting you go, why in Heaven's name should you grudge it to her?"

Arbuthnot was impressed, but to confess this would have been to concede too much to Mr Brooke's greater experience of life. "Where did you learn so much about women?" he asked lightly, as he took up his sword again.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOUR.

ARBUTHNOT had called at the Orphanage and asked to see Janie, and Sister M'Kay, after scrutinising him with great interest, had resigned the office to them for half an hour, since the nurses had here no room in which to receive visitors. Janie had innumerable things to ask about the conflict with the fakir.

"And you had really been tracking him all the time? But don't you think it was rather a risk to leave it so long? He very nearly succeeded, you know."

"But I had nothing against him before. All my shadowing had only resulted in showing him to be a particularly peaceable old person, not in communication with any suspicious characters, and apparently unarmed. He had the dagger hidden in his *lathi*, you see, like a sword-cane, and it was when he went to fetch it that I slipped into his place in the front row. I do see now that I ran it rather fine, but I thought I had provided for everything by getting Brooke to intersperse a dozen of the men among the crowd just at hand. I suppose I was trying to keep an eye on the fakir and the carriage at the same moment, for the old miscreant managed to slip between the troopers like an eel, and was on the carriage step before I could follow."

"And has Lord Williams sent for you to thank you?"

"Oh yes, I've been thanked all right."

"Did you go to him in your disguise?"

"Rather not! The second fakir has disappeared. I went as the Shikari officer who accounted for the assassin."

"And was Lord Williams nice?"

"Awfully! Promised me the work I should have chosen out of the whole world if I'd been asked." He leaned forward and spoke in a low voice, and Janie grew pale.

"If you like it, I am glad," she said at last, with a little gasp.

"Like it? Of course I do. But I wanted just to tell you." He rose abruptly, and held out his hand. "Good-bye. You will think of me sometimes, won't you? I wanted you to know what I was doing."

"Oh yes, of course. Good-bye. And when do you start?" asked Janie incoherently.

"To-day, I think—— No; to-morrow, I mean. God bless you." He went out, but returned, and shut the door again. "I say, I can't bear to think of you at the front like this. You wouldn't go home, I suppose?"

"Certainly not," with some asperity.

"And you wouldn't go to the Thorpes? They are settled at Akhbarabad for the present, and she would be delighted to have you. I should feel so much easier in my mind——"

"So long as there is work for me here, and Sister M'Kay will keep me, here I shall stay," said Janie, with decision.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to dictate." He opened the door again, paused in the doorway, and returned a second time. "Promise me that you will make use of Brooke if you are in any difficulty. Anything in the way of help or advice, you know—— He'll be delighted——"

"If Mr Brooke is within reach, I will be sure to ask his advice." She spoke with a kind of hard distinctness.

"Thanks. I should be happier if I knew you had

some one. Good-bye. I said it before, didn't I? Good-bye again, then."

He was really gone this time, it seemed, for she heard him walk down the passage. But while her ears were still strained to listen, he came back a third time. She could only look at him dumbly.

"I wanted to tell you," he said hurriedly, "that I have put my life into your hands on purpose. I wouldn't have gone if Williams had refused to let me tell you where I was going. I—I thought you would like to know."

Janie was incapable of speech, but she forced her face into a contortion which she hoped would do duty as a smile. Suddenly the hands with which she was gripping the edge of Sister M'Kay's desk were seized and held.

"Janie, I can't go without telling you. I made up my mind I wouldn't—I know I ought to leave you free—but I can't. Could you—when I come back, I mean—could you care for me a little?"

The pain in her throat made it impossible to say a word, and when she tried to look at him, her eyes fell before his. He released her hands, and she pressed them to her breast to keep herself from sobbing. He was speaking again, rapidly, apologetically.

"Forgive me; I oughtn't to have done it. Don't be afraid; I shan't bother you. Forget all about it."

Janie spoke to some purpose. "Wretch!" she said, and sat down in Sister M'Kay's chair and wept. In a moment he was kneeling beside her, entreating her not to cry, offering to go away, but not attempting to do so, promising never to come near her again if she did not wish it. Her mingled feelings expressed themselves in exasperation, though whether with herself or him she could not have told. "Why—won't—you—understand?" she managed to utter between her sobs.

"Understand what? You don't mean——? But why did you look at me and look away without speaking? And you said I was a wretch."

"So you were—and are." Janie had succeeded in

finding her handkerchief, and was beginning to recover herself. "You told me to forget all about it. As if I could!"

"Then you don't mind my having spoken to you?"

"Mind! when you had done every possible thing to show me that you cared, except just speaking."

"I know I oughtn't to have done it. But yet, if you knew——?"

"You ought to have done it. How was I to know that you meant it, otherwise? Don't you see how much nicer it is to feel that we belong to each other, that perhaps, when I am praying for you, you may be saying at that very minute, 'God bless——'" her voice failed.

"God bless my Janie," said Arbuthnot, very softly. "I shall say it very often."

"Oh, I don't want you to go!" cried Janie, breaking down again. "I can't bear to think of your running such risks. If I ask you, won't you——? Oh, I am trying to keep you back from your duty! I won't be a coward. I'll try and be like Burree."

"Brooke said I ought to tell you, but I thought it wasn't fair. Doesn't it make it worse for you?"

"No, of course not. Mr Brooke is a very understanding man—for a man. But it was horrid of you to talk to him about me."

"Why, wouldn't you have talked to Miss Weston about me?"

"Of course, but that's quite different. Men always make jokes about really important things. I know."

"Neither of us did, I promise you." Arbuthnot wisely refrained from either disputing the accuracy or inquiring the source of Janie's knowledge of men. "But there's one thing I meant to remind you of before I spoke to you, dear. I believe I ought to have written, after all. You see, I know how my mother hated it, and I don't think I could stand it if you ever looked at me as she did sometimes. The Begum is my great-grandmother, and nothing can alter it."

"If the Begum objects to me as little-as I do to her,

"I think you will have a very peaceful life," said Janie, trying to speak lightly. "Are you afraid?"

Arbuthnot looked into her eyes. "No," he said; "I am not afraid."

In the crowd of officers of all ranks that thronged Farishtabad and its cantonments, the absence of one lieutenant of Mounted Infantry passed almost unnoticed. Mr Brooke missed his right-hand man, and to Janie the blank would have been rather less if the whole army had vanished and Arbuthnot remained, but only one other person seemed even to be aware of his existence. Lord Williams visited the Antony Hospital, and to her infinite confusion Janie found herself called up and presented by Sister M'Kay. A kindly greeting, and the promise to send her, through Mr Brooke, any news that might arrive as to her lover's movements—and she returned to her colleagues, who could not help considering the honour done her a little excessive. After all, the Shikaris had only turned up in time to account for the assassin, they said; the real hero was the poor fakir who had been put out of the way without any one's troubling to make a fuss about him. Janie accepted the rebuke with outward meekness and inward pride, and was rewarded by twice receiving tidings of Arbuthnot. Once another secret agent had seen him at Dera Galib Khan, and later on, a friendly chief—whose friendship was necessarily dissembled with great care—managed to send word that he had entered the Sarasgala Pass. After that he disappeared, and Sunday after Sunday Mr Brooke met Janie with the least perceptible shake of the head.

In the meantime, work went on without waiting for the return of the messenger. The age-long feud between the Civil and Military Services slumbered in presence of the crisis—or perhaps the civilians were not entirely blind to the increased power and independence they derived from the preoccupation of a Viceroy who was present avowedly as a soldier for the purpose of putting an end to the war. In any

case, the government was carried on with the minimum amount of friction, and the demands of the military authorities were met with surprising willingness. The Granthistan troops were being reorganised under the Viceroy's own eye, with the assistance of the English veterans, many of whom had served under him in earlier years, while the Commander-in-Chief, who was willing to confess that he knew more of the general principles of war than of the Indian application of them, applied himself specially to the work of co-ordinating the two armies to be employed in the intended advance. There was no lack of recruits for the broken native regiments, for white-bearded men came in from all points of the compass to offer their services to their old commander, bringing with them sons and nephews duly grounded in fabulous accounts of his exploits. There was also a continuous stream of refugees from Granthistan proper, who crossed the Ghara on inflated skins and made their way to the nearest British post with tales of ruin and outrage endured at the hands of the Scythians and their wild allies from Ethiopia and the frontier tribes, and from these the depleted ranks of the transport and commissariat drivers and coolies were refilled. Some one compared the British position to the lion's cave of classical fame, in that from it there were *vestigia nulla retrorsum*, for the fugitives were not allowed to linger in the neighbourhood of the river, but shepherded to a safe distance behind it, where they were enlisted or employed on relief works according to their age and strength.

The account they brought of the Scythian conquerors was eminently calculated to console the British mind. A certain number of their tribal allies, like the Moguls and Rohillas of earlier centuries, had been rewarded with *jaghirs* in various parts of Granthistan, and were keeping things alive by the guerilla war waged between them and the rightful owners, while those for whom no land could be found, or who could not sell their swords to their more

fortunate friends, hung about the Scythian posts, driving the officers to distraction by their demands and picking quarrels with the soldiers. An elaborate system of law and order, manufactured at Pavelsburg and warranted ready for use, had formed part of the baggage of the Scythian army on its march towards India, and was supposed to be in active operation, but the framers appeared to have underestimated the force of human nature, whether in themselves or their allies. Murders, abductions, and raids were of perpetual occurrence, and the state of the country seemed to approximate towards that of the period so much favoured by the bards and story-tellers of Granthistan—"before the English came." It is only due to these praisers of time past to say that the chorus of complaint called forth by this return to primitive conditions was almost as loud as it would have been in similar circumstances in England.

It was about this time that the Hercynian papers, which had never tired hitherto of lauding the prowess of their Scythian neighbours, and prophesying the entire extinction of British influence in India, executed, with more or less grace and dexterity according to the comparative suddenness with which they had received orders from a high quarter, a complete *volte-face*. It appeared that the Scythians had done enough for honour, and that any further advance, even with the aid of a new season's reinforcements, was very unlikely to succeed. The position of the army already in Granthistan would become precarious in the extreme if the rumoured recrudescence of Rustam Khan's cause in Ethiopia proved to be genuine, and in any case, India north of the Ghara was nothing but an expensive death-trap when divorced from the richer districts to the south. As a third party friendly to both belligerents, and always devoted to the interests of peace, Hercynia would suggest to Scythia that she should withdraw her victorious troops from India in consideration of an indemnity from England, and the concession by Xipangue of a free hand in the Far

East. This unselfish suggestion met with a reception calculated to shake the faith of the virtuous Hercynians in human nature. The Scythian papers made rude remarks recalling the absolute failure of Hercynia to give the support with the promise of which she had egged on Scythia to make war, while England considered she had a better use for her money, and Xipangue for her territory, than that proposed. The knowledge of the failing health of the venerable Emperor of Pannonia, which became public at this juncture, completed the moral discomfiture of Hercynia, by supplying every journalist in the world with a key to the vacillations of her recent conduct, and her present wish for a strong Scythia behind her.

The eagles were now gathering for the conflict. At Bombay and Bab-us-Sahel troopships were disembarking contingents from the Colonies and drafts from England. The British drafts were detailed at once for garrison and police duty, while the seasoned men they replaced were sent up to the front. The Colonial contingents ought in all equity to have suffered the same fate, but the authorities knew too well the material they were dealing with, and Australians, Canadians, and South Africans were added to the force which was eventually to advance towards Iskandarbagh by way of Shalkot. The first step forward had already been taken. When the Ghara became the limit of British territory, some instinct of compunction had withheld the then Commander-in-Chief from destroying the railway bridge which opened the way from Farishtabad to Ranjitgarh on the one hand and Agpur far on the other. It had remained intact, guarded by a redoubt at the northern end against the raiding parties of Scythian and tribal horse that swept the plain and found an objective for their efforts in this lingering relic of British dominion. When the next cavalry raid was about due, plans were laid for dealing with it. The raiders' scouts, reconnoitring cautiously in the direction of the bridge, discovered

that the redoubt was untenanted, and called up their main body to destroy it. One of the horses touched with his hoof an unobtrusive wire, and the scene was changed. From a battery on the bridge itself, and from two howitzers concealed below the river-bank, came a hail of shell, and when the surviving invaders began a precipitate retreat, the firing ceased suddenly, and they were charged by a squadron of Bengal Lancers judiciously posted among the sand-hills. It was some time before another raid took place, and on this occasion the raiders were not able even to approach the bridge. A strong entrenched position had been constructed, not only defending the bridge and its approaches, but covering a large extent of ground. England possessed a foothold once more on the north of the Ghara.

The news of this step forward aroused wild enthusiasm at home. During two long months of apparent inaction the wave of patriotic excitement which had turned out the former Ministry had lost some of its force, and there were plenty of people to mutter that after all, Lord Mulliner and Lord Williams were not able to do any better than their predecessors. Lord Cooke's operations at the War Office were disturbing vested interests and outraging the ideas of many reputable persons, and so far there seemed nothing to show for it. A general action once a-week is the smallest allowance on which the average street-bred Briton can keep up a healthy interest in a war waged at a distance. The skirmish at the bridge and the fortifying of the new position were assumed to be preparatory to an instant advance, and great was the disappointment when no movement of importance followed. The true value of the move appeared only to the initiated. Within the lines of the new entrenchments Lord Williams formed what was humorously called the "camp of exercise," in which the reconstructed regiments, with their haunting memories of disaster and defeat, faced the enemy again, and in repelling surprise attacks regained their

self-respect. That these attacks continued to be mere cavalry raids was in itself an important point. Were the Scythians still possessed of the dash and decision which had led them on so triumphantly from one success to another during the past year, or had the hardships of campaigning, followed by the seductions of Ranjitgarh and Nanakpur, combined with the difficulties of their present position to incline them to inactivity? The question was satisfactorily answered when time passed on and no serious attempt was made to drive the British out of the entrenched camp.

The streets of Farishtabad were brown all day with marching men, and at night restless sleepers raised their heads to hear the muffled rumble of ammunition-waggons rolling along dusty roads. The viceregal surroundings had always been of a simplicity that roused captious comment from the administrative purists who were reluctantly compelled to countenance them, but now the Viceroy himself might be seen inspecting the field-equipment proposed for his party, and discarding superfluities with the stern joy of an iconoclast. Lord Williams was about to take the field in person, and the official world, military and civil, lifted up its voice and protested in vain. It was sixty years since the anomaly had been seen of a fighting Governor-General, and on the Commander-in-Chief was poured the pity which he showed no sign of feeling for himself.

Janie watched all the preparations with growing anxiety. Work at the Antony Hospital was fairly light just now, the cases being almost confined to a few men seriously wounded in the skirmishes across the river, and the inevitable enteric, and she had all the more time for brooding over Arbuthnot's absence and his long silence. No date had been announced for the departure of the Viceroy, and she clung to the hope that it might not yet be fixed. But one day Mr Brooke called upon her—not to bring news, as she saw by a glance at his face.

“We may be leaving any day now—this is con-

fidential," he said; "and I thought I would say good-bye in case I was prevented from coming just at the last."

"That means you are starting to-morrow—or is it to-day?" asked Janie, divining that he would come as late as possible.

"To-morrow—confidential again."

"Oh, of course. But—is Lord Williams not going to wait—till Jock comes back?"

Mr Brooke looked past her. "It's impossible, I'm afraid. As a matter of fact, Arbuthnot ought to be back now, and we can't afford to wait, or waste time in sending another messenger. We must chance Rustam Khan's joining us when he hears what we are doing. You see, don't you, that to wait until the passes are open, and the Scythians can pour down reinforcements, would be madness?"

"Yes, I see," murmured Janie. "But what do you think has happened—honestly?" she turned upon him. He was not to be taken by surprise.

"Knowing Arbuthnot as I do, I should say that he has got through to Rustam Khan, and is staying with him, finding it impossible to get back. He may have been chased, or even recognised, on his way up, you know. Then he will instruct Rustam as to the best way of co-operating, much to our advantage, and you will hear of him next in a blaze of glory."

Janie was silent, trying to accept the offered comfort, and he spoke again. "I am sorry to have to leave you in this uncertainty, but you have good friends. Your Superintendent and Major Saundersfoot will look after you, and Mrs Thorpe is always ready to offer you a refuge. Then Lady Williams will be delighted to befriend you, for Arbuthnot's sake, so don't let yourself feel desolate."

The advice was kind, but difficult to follow, and Janie felt very desolate indeed as she watched Mr Brooke's small spare khaki-clad form pass out of sight. At times the thought of Arbuthnot's possible peril would grip her with absolute agony, and at night she had

often started from sleep believing that she heard his voice crying to her for help. She was thankful that she was on night duty just now, so that this terror of the darkness would be spared her, but she found the long quiet hours, with their distant sounds of traffic, scarcely less hard to bear. Sleepy orderlies complained bitterly that Sister never gave them a quarter of an hour's peace that night, and the comments of wakeful patients were not of the character associated in history with the worship of the "Lady with the Lamp."

Her watch was over at last, and Janie passed out of the ward. Some one was leaning against one of the pillars of the verandah, and as she appeared in the doorway, Arbuthnot came forward to meet her, his face grey in the grey light. Her eyes, worn with want of sleep, gazed at him with actual terror.

"Why, Janie, don't you know me?" he asked, in wounded surprise. She threw up her hands.

"Oh, I thought you were dead, and had come to tell me!" she cried. He caught her, as she tottered, in a reassuring clasp, and she laid her head on his shoulder, and despite strenuous efforts, sobbed for joy. It was only for a moment, for there might be servants about, and one of the sternest of Eleanor's unwritten laws had forbidden demonstrations of affection before the natives.

"I didn't mean to be such a baby," she murmured at last, fingering Arbuthnot's shoulder-strap lovingly; "but I have wanted you so dreadfully. When did you come?"

"Got in late last night, and been closeted with H.E. ever since. Janie, are you sure you are glad to see me back? Now don't cry again, or I shall be certain you aren't! Do you know that I go off again to-night?"

"Oh, only one day?" cried Janie in dismay. Then her tone changed. "No, don't be afraid. I simply *won't* cry any more till you are gone. A whole day together! What shall we do with it?"

"Let me choose," pleaded Arbuthnot coaxingly.

‘Have you got a plan? Aren’t you going to tell me?’

“Oh yes, I am going to tell you fast enough. You play an important part in it, you see. Little girl, let us get married.”

“Married? To-day?” gasped Janie.

“Exactly. That’s my plan.”

“But to waste our only day together——!”

“Waste!” mocked Arbuthnot. “Janie, dearest, you can’t think how I have worried about you since I have been away this time. I thought, ‘Suppose I never come back, there she is left just like a widow, but with no pension or anything.’ If we are married, you see, you would get anything that would come to me. And besides, if anything happened to me, I could send for you.”

“Do you mean that they would let me come with you to-night if—we did as you want?”

“Oh no, rather not! Only if I was wounded—and I can’t promise that’ll happen. Really, you know,” insinuatingly, “it won’t make any difference to you till the war’s over—only to my feelings. You can go on with this nursing business if you like—your Senior’s a real good sort—or you might stay with Mrs Thorpe. But if you only knew how much happier it would make me!”

“But how could we possibly manage it, in such a hurry?”

“Why, this is how I planned it out. You take a good rest this morning—you look as if you hadn’t slept for a week—while I run round and hunt up a Padri and a licence and all that sort of thing. Then we get married and go for a long drive together in the cool—sort of mirage of a honeymoon, don’t you know?—and you drop me at the station for the seven o’clock train. Bills and all the brass hats will be going, and this humble one will sneak in somewhere at the rear.”

“And it would really make you happier?” She spoke in the gentle, wondering voice of the woman

not unwilling to sacrifice her own wishes if the sacrifice is to bring pleasure to an unreasonable man.

"Rather! I could die happy—no, I don't mean that; I could go away happy."

"If you will really feel happier, then—but you won't think——"

"No, no buts now. You've promised, and you are going to have your reward. If you marry me to-day, you will have the honour of being given away by his grateful and appreciative Excellency the Viceroy; but the offer holds good for to-day only."

"By Lord Williams?" Her eyes shone, and Arbuthnot laughed.

"Yes, I knew you would have married George of Agpur with that inducement. That's why I didn't tell you before. Brooke will back me up, and I shall need it. I am to do the same for him some day."

"Oh, if Burree were only here!" sighed Janie.

"You and I will go and look her up together when the war is over. Will she ever forgive me, do you think? She doesn't altogether approve of me, you know."

"She doesn't know you as I do," said Janie, a little stiffly. "If she did, it would be all right. Otherwise, of course——"

"You would have nothing to do with me? Are you trying to make me thankful that she isn't here? Then you will be ready, dear? I settled the hour and everything with the Superintendent before I saw you."

"Before even asking me?" cried Janie.

"There was so little time," he said apologetically. "I had to secure her interest when I got a chance, but it was purely provisional, I assure you. And there was Lord Williams, you see."

"Jock, wait!" she called after him as he looked back at her and laughed. "You are limping. Are you wounded?"

"I got a Scythian bullet through my leg when I was slipping past Iskandarbagh. It's all right now."

"But who nursed you? What did you do?"

"Cut it out," he answered grimly. "Then I had to stay with Rustam Khan until I could walk properly again. That was what delayed me. I couldn't trust state secrets to the mercy of a game leg."

"But will you always be lame?"

"I'm afraid so. Rather a serious disadvantage in my line of life—another identification-mark, you know. By the bye, perhaps you'll refuse to marry a lame man?"

"Jock!" She made a vigorous but unsuccessful attempt to shake him. "You know I shall be prouder of it than if you had got a medal. Only I do wish I had been there to take care of you."

"Thank Heaven you weren't!" he muttered, his face growing grave. "Dear little woman, when this war is over, you shall do what you like with me, but while it lasts——"

"I know," she said steadily. "It is to be just as if we were not married. Only, if you are badly hurt, you promise?"

"I promise," he said, and left her.

The moment he was gone, up came Sister M'Kay, who might almost have been supposed to be lying in wait for his departure, and despatched Janie promptly to bed, assuring her that she had nothing to do but get up when she was called, and no responsibility whatever. She should be married in uniform, and Sister Lawson and another old East End colleague, also in uniform, should attend her, and Sister M'Kay would have great pleasure in personating her mother or aunt for the occasion, and she was to get a good sleep, and not disgrace the hospital by looking as if she was upon the verge of a break-down. Janie felt that it would be impossible to sleep, but she was mistaken. Sleep came to her when she was wondering whether Arbuthnot would get hold of the station Padri or one of the military chaplains, and what would happen if he could only find a Presbyterian, for instance; and she was not roused until Sister Lawson peeped in at her.

"It's just nice time now, dear, and he has sent you such a lovely bouquet. Sister M'Kay says you oughtn't to carry it in uniform. She thought of keeping it back."

Janie sat up. "I would carry it if—if I had to break open Sister M'Kay's safe to get at it," she said, and meant it.

There were white flowers in the church as well as in Janie's bouquet, and the scarlet and grey and khaki of the congregation were relieved against palms and greenery. The only civilian present was Lady Williams, some one said afterwards, and she might almost be considered a soldier in right of her husband. To Janie the whole thing seemed like a dream—the well-known faces of Arbuthnot and Mr Brooke and the nurses, and that of Lord Williams, so long familiar in pictures, standing out against an indistinguishable crowd of strangers. Once or twice the recollection of the actual facts came to her with a sharp pang—when, after signing the register, somebody produced another document, scarcely longer than the historic "All to my wife," to which Arbuthnot put his name, trying not to let her see it, and when she found the aisle lined with officers, and realised that they were to pass down to the door under a glittering arch of swords. She had seen the compliment paid at other military weddings, and it had seemed to her pretty enough, but now it gave her a stab of pain; the sword was too near all of them. She was white to the lips as she entered the shadow of the steel, gripping her husband's arm convulsively, but she forced herself to look up, for was she not a soldier's wife?—and she saw that there was no shadow at all, but a constant succession of quivering lights. There was a parable here, but its meaning eluded her as she sat by Arbuthnot's side during a meal of some sort at the Viceregal headquarters, which looked very bare and dismantled already, and tried to appreciate the kind things which were being said about him. It would be an unspeakable comfort to remember them in future, she knew,

but now it seemed as if she could not think of anything. Then she was in another room, and Sister M'Kay and Sister Lawson were exchanging her cap for a *topi*, and she heard her own voice asking them to put the bouquet in water, and then she was going down the steps between Arbuthnot and Lord Williams and being helped into a buggy, and some people were cheering somewhere near at hand.

"Thank you, sir, for all your kindness." She repeated the words which she had last heard uttered, and her husband turned and looked into her strained, frightened face. He said nothing, but tucked the rug more closely round her knees and laid a hand on hers for a moment, and the tense feeling passed away as she sat silent by his side, and they drove rapidly along the well-watered road.

"I like that psalm," she said at last. "It's Burree's favourite."

"Really?" said Arbuthnot, hardly daring to look at her.

"Yes; she says it is so nice that the man could not be really happy, even when all went well with him, unless he knew that his country was prosperous and at peace."

"Now that's exactly the view I should have expected Miss Weston to take," said Arbuthnot deliberately.

Janie gave a little shiver. "Even Burree would be satisfied with us to-day," she said. "We are preferring the country above our chief joy."

After that the spell of silence was broken, and they risked life and limb on a *kutchra* road beside a canal, while Arbuthnot paid much more attention to conversation than to his driving. Having once got into this apology for a road, they were bound to go on until they reached the king's highway, for to retrace their steps would have been cruel to the horse and have meant missing the train. When they came to the *pucca* road, a fresh horse was awaiting them in charge of a groom, and Janie made a desperate little joke about driving on and on, away from Farishtabad,

and never being heard of again. But the new horse carried them back all too swiftly along the metalled track, and before Janie could have believed it possible they were at the station, with Lord Williams and his staff entraining in the utmost possible glare of electric light. Sister M'Kay stepped forward as the buggy stopped.

"You're in good time," she remarked conversationally, "but none to spare. Jenny, you won't get out?"

"Better not, dearest," said Arbuthnot, and Janie submitted. A hasty farewell, a last lingering clasp of the hand, and he was gone. Janie, trying to follow with tear-dimmed eyes one khaki-clad figure among many, was not at first aware that Lord Williams was standing beside the cart.

"Give him a smile to go off with, Mrs Arbuthnot," he said quickly, and Arbuthnot, turning for a last look, saw the sun shining through tears.

"Oh, please take care of him!" entreated Janie breathlessly, as she shook hands with the Viceroy.

"I will, I will!" he assured her.

"Silly Jenny!" said Sister M'Kay, assuming the reins with a masterful hand. "The idea of asking a general to take care of a junior officer!"

"It would have been silly to ask some men," said Janie; "but he understands."

CHAPTER XXI.

ST PATRICK'S DAY.

"I AM disappointed," said Major Saundersfoot, with due solemnity. "We seem to have wasted time long enough. I always thought that when Bills took the field himself we should go forward with a run."

"But we have advanced to the Grand Canal," objected Janie. Major Saundersfoot looked at her compassionately.

"What's that?" he said. "If we are going to move four miles in three days, and then spend a week in entrenching ourselves, the Scythians may peg out claims in Granthistan for eternity."

"I'm sure Lord Williams will do the right thing," persisted Janie.

"Of course you are, Sister, and very creditable to you it is. But a man, and one—if I may say it—with a certain amount of military experience, naturally looks at things from a different point of view. Williams moves slowly nowadays."

"Oh, there's the telephone!" cried Janie irrelevantly, and Sister M'Kay, who had been listening with amused superiority, dashed to the instrument.

"It's for you, Jenny," she said, and proceeded to engage Major Saundersfoot in conversation at such a distance as the size of the office permitted.

"Are you there, Janie? All right. Can you get leave for this afternoon? Lady Bills is bringing out a party of *bari mems* to see the camp, and she'll look after you. The Tommies have a big sing-song on

to-night, to celebrate St Patrick's Eve, and T.E.'s will attend in state. I'll look out for you here."

"Oh, Sister, may I have leave?" gasped Janie. "The soldiers have a concert to-night, and Lady Williams will take me out to the camp."

"And bring you back in the middle of the night, I suppose?" said Sister M'Kay. "Nice doings for a respectable hospital! But some one else is responsible for you now, so I'll look the other way."

Janie sent her message, and presently a viceregal *chaprasi* appeared with a polite invitation, written by an aide-de-camp, to Mrs Arbuthnot to join her Excellency's party at one o'clock—a request duly obeyed by Mrs Arbuthnot with much trepidation. Janie was not particularly self-conscious, but in this high society she had a depressing sense of being very junior, which is even worse than feeling very young. Lady Williams received her with great kindness, and accounted for her to several ladies by reminding them that her husband had been instrumental in saving the Viceroy's life when he was attacked by that fanatic last December. The ladies looked at Janie with cold eyes, and an evident resentment of her husband's presumption in doing a service which would have been so much more worthily performed by a man of some official rank, and Janie felt inclined to apologise for his existence and hers. In the train she made herself as small and unobtrusive as possible, deeply conscious of a *durzee*-made gown of country tweed, and a hat that had only too evidently never seen Paris, while two very great ladies, who had refused her timid offer to exchange seats with one of them, talked diagonally across her. Their talk was mysterious, of wheels and wires and influence, and Janie learned more about woman's influence than she had ever known before. It would never have occurred to her in what high quarters it might usefully be exercised, nor with what contempt its exerciser would regard its object. The greater the efforts needed to "influence" a person, the more he was to be despised

for being influenced, apparently. Then there was some lamentation over the good old times. Nowadays, even when a man had obtained a post, he might be deprived of it if he did not show himself qualified to hold it. Such a misfortune had recently happened to the *protégé* of one of the ladies, and she described it justly as extremely mortifying. Every one raved about efficiency now, and India was not what it had been.

From these ethereal heights Janie descended with joyful haste, when the train, which had for some time been passing through a town of tents, slowed down at a newly-erected platform. Her eye scanned critically, but without interest, the gorgeous array of warriors present to receive Lady Williams, until she caught sight of Arbuthnot modestly isolated behind them. He had seen her, and when her companions left the carriage, she waited until he joined her, happy at last in her unimportance.

"I wish we could simply stay in the train all by ourselves until it's time to go home," she said after a time. "There are so many people about."

"So do I," said Arbuthnot, peering cautiously from the window, "but the Shikaris were determined to lunch us, so I had to give in. They mean well, of course, but it's an awful bore. I have a cart here, and when the big people are gone, we'll drive to our camp. We can get a drive in the late afternoon, too."

The luncheon was rather an ordeal for Janie, more especially as it gave her a feeling that something was on foot that she did not understand. Her husband's comrades seemed to consider the inaction of the army, which had moved Major Saundersfoot to indignation, as an excellent joke. They consulted her as to the advisability of building permanent bungalows and having their wives up, and several invited her to come and see the gardens they were laying out round their tents. She could not help feeling that it was a pity to let the servants carry away the impression that

no further advance need be expected for an indefinite time, and wondered that Mr Brooke, sitting watchful at her left hand, did not check the talk. But the luncheon was over at last, and she forgot her perturbations when Arbuthnot took her round the camp, and even as far as the advanced works on the Grand Canal. They came back for a hasty meal in his tent, and then it was time to take their places for the concert, which, as he impressed upon her, was to be a very grand affair, far superior to the ordinary camp displays of musical genius. They found seats allotted to them close to those set aside for the viceregal party, and Arbuthnot pointed out to her various people of note, and explained that the Commander-in-Chief was absent owing to a fall from his horse. For herself she distinguished Mr Cholmeley-Smith, in uncompromising field dress, his countenance wearing a reproachful expression.

"He's been doing Cassandra for ten days," said Arbuthnot, when she pointed him out—"thinks he's the only man in camp that means fighting. This concert shows that Bills is fiddling while Rome is burning, of course. Hope some one will clear the silly ass out, and make him put on decent clothes before the Excellencies come. Ah, that's it! Lewin's got him. He thinks Bills is slack, because he can't get anything to send to his paper, and it never strikes him that there may be things in contemplation which he has no idea of."

Arbuthnot stopped suddenly, as if he had said too much, and warned Janie, quite unnecessarily, of the arrival of Lord and Lady Williams, which was heralded at the moment by the rising of the assembly. To Janie's delight, when the viceregal party had taken their places, she and he were in comfortable obscurity. Between the heads of the people in front she could see the temporary stage, surrounded by tall cressets flaring up against the dark sky, and flanked on either side by a mass of faces, fading into darkness at the extremities, but in her sheltered position she could

slide her hand into her husband's without being observed, and weep in safety at all the pathetic songs. Once or twice she noted a movement among the faces opposite, and sometimes an officer slipped unobtrusively out of the audience, but it was a great shock when Arbuthnot's clasp of her hand tightened suddenly, and she heard him whisper, "I must go, dear."

"On guard?" she asked, in dismay. "Surely Mr Brooke would let some one relieve you, just for this evening?"

"He can't manage it. Give me one kiss, dearest. No one will see. It's been a little bit of heaven having you here."

He was gone before she could look round, and she sat solitary until his place was taken by Colonel Garry, the Medical Officer she had met at Gajnipur, who escorted her to the train, when the concert was over, to rejoin Lady Williams's party. Lord Williams shook hands with her on the platform.

"Has Arbuthnot forsaken you?" he asked kindly.

"He had to go on guard," was the doleful answer, but as she uttered it, Janie's ears detected a well-known sound in the distance—the roll of waggons on a dusty road. Her eyes met the Viceroy's, and the mystery of the invitation to the camp, the grand concert, and the men who did not stay to the end, was clear to her. There was no more slackness about Lord Williams now than in his most dashing days. He wished her good-night, but made no further remark, and she went home proudly. As she drove up to the hospital, Major Saundersfoot ran out of his office and stopped her cart.

"Did you see Germaine at the camp, Mrs Arbuthnot?" he asked her.

"No, my husband said he had had a fall from his horse, and was on the sick list," she answered.

"I thought so! That idiot Corporal Noakes came back from the Paniati camp to-night"—Paniati was some seventy miles east of Farishtabad, on the same side of the river, and served at present as the head-

quarters of the First Army—"and would have it that he had met the C.-in-C. in a red motor car on the road."

"What a funny thing!" said Janie. "I shouldn't have thought he could have mistaken him. I wonder——" she stopped suddenly.

"Oh, the fellows at Paniati had been feeding him up with prospects of an immediate advance, so he was naturally excited. Not much likelihood of that, worse luck! I hear from the south to-night that it's touch and go at Shamsabad. If they rise, we shall have every Mohammedan community in India up behind us."

"But don't you think it may be an advance, after all?"

"Where are the troops? Safe camped at Paniati—not on the way here, at any rate. The road is quite clear."

"Oh, but I meant an advance direct from Paniati, across the river to Jalun."

"Unfortunately we can't fly yet, and you may have forgotten that the Jalun bridge was blown up when we retired, and has not been repaired."

"But that's no reason why it shouldn't be!" said Janie, under her breath. She had an unbounded faith in Lord Williams, and on this particular evening a sense also of being a sharer in his plans. She did not know what they were, nor had she the faintest idea how they could be carried out, but she was convinced that he had something in hand that would be successful. To say this to Major Saundersfoot, however, would only provoke him to further jeers, and she bade him good-night in a suitably chastened tone, and went on.

The next day or two there was an utter dearth of news, and the non-combatants stranded at Farishtabad argued hotly with one another that this was due, on the one hand to the presumption that nothing was being done, on the other to an increased strictness of the censorship. On the third morning, when Janie met Major Saundersfoot, he addressed her with exaggerated deference.

"Mrs Arbuthnot, you were right and I was wrong. There was something up the day before yesterday. Lord Williams made a reconnaissance in force from the Grand Canal. The cavalry got as far as Tej Singh, and captured an armoured train that tried to interfere with them."

"Yes, and then?" asked Janie breathlessly.

"Oh, then they all went back comfortably into camp behind the canal," was the crushing reply. "Did you expect Williams to recover Ranjitgarh by a *coup de main*?"

"I suppose there's an account in the 'Pen and Sword'?" said Janie, trying to conceal her disappointment.

"Oh, a glowing one. But you can see that the idea is to make haste slowly. They talk of loads of railway material—sleepers and rails—coming into camp by road from the westward, so it's pretty clear that the Scythians are concentrating upon Ranjitgarh, blowing up the line behind them, and that Bills will build it again as he advances."

"But from the west?" said Janie, astonished.

"Oh, that's a misprint, obviously. Of course they mean from the east."

"But we should have seen the waggons if they had passed through Farishtabad."

"Yes, I'm inclined to think they must have repaired the Jalun bridge sufficiently for traffic, after all—or perhaps they took the stuff over in the ferry—so that it got into camp along the north bank of the river."

"But there's no road," said Janie, in great excitement—"no *pucca* road, my husband told me so, and not even a continuous *kutchra* road. What can it mean?"

Major Saundersfoot laughed good-humouredly. "The bazar-people will furnish you with a very pleasant meaning," he said. "The talk there is that the Paniati force has crossed the river at Jalun, and is advancing on Nanakpur."

"Well, and why not?" she cried. "They were

right about the defeat at Agpur, when none of us believed it."

"Ah, why not? Because we can't fly, as I said to you once before. But even if the natives are right, it doesn't account for the delivery of railway material. No, I'm afraid that a gradual slow advance along the railway line is the only theory that will fit the facts, and if Bills doesn't hurry himself a little he will have to leave the advance alone, and take his army down to Shamsabad. The Wazir and the Resident are hard put to it to keep the state troops in check."

"I believe we are enveloped in a fog of war," said Janie, using the military phrase with much contentment. "Great movements are going on all round us, but we can't penetrate them, because we are not in the secrets of the master mind."

"Don't be so professional, Jenny," said Sister M'Kay, who had come up. "Any one might think you had married the Chief of the Staff instead of a Volunteer lieutenant."

"What's up at the 'Pen and Sword' office?" Major Saundersfoot quickened his steps, leaving behind the medical friend with whom he had been discussing inoculation for enteric, and who was taken by surprise in the midst of his most telling statistics. The 'Pen and Sword' had transferred its headquarters to Farishtabad on the retirement from Ranjitgarh, and just now the verandah in front of its temporary offices was blocked by an excited crowd that overflowed into the compound.

"Some fool of a Sapper blown himself up with his own dynamite, or something equally exciting," growled the other man, but he followed Major Saundersfoot in at the gate and up to the verandah, where every one was too busy to notice them.

"What's up? Can't you tell us what's up?" The impatient question, reinforced by a tug at his coat, at last induced one of the eager talkers to turn round.

"Can't you read plain English? Oh, it's you, is it? Williams is in Ranjitgarh."

"What! prisoner?"

"Prisoner be blowed! He's captured it."

"Impossible!" Major Saundersfoot clambered up to the verandah and hurled himself upon the crowd, making his way to the front by sheer force of weight. "'Lord Williams entered Ranjitgarh at nine o'clock this morning,'" he read from the telegram posted on the wall. "'The complicated series of operations which began upon St Patrick's Day is thus completely successful, and the first step has been taken towards freeing India from her invaders——' Oh, gas, pure gas! What operations? How has it been done?"

"Rout out Horninglow," suggested some one, and the crowd raised loud demands for the editor, who was engaged in getting out a special issue, (with sketch-maps,) and was inclined to maintain a haughty and Olympian remoteness.

"Most certainly it is true," he said. "It is from our correspondent with the Viceroy. Of course we have known for some days how things were likely to turn out, but in the interests of the public service we were bound to refrain from hinting at what was going on. And now—— Yes, coming!—— Excuse me; impossible to stop."

He was master of the situation, for the longer they detained him, the longer must they wait for the coveted details, and they quitted the verandah and the compound discomfited, loudly expressing the opinion that until this moment Mr Horninglow had known no more than anybody else, and that the censorship had only just been relaxed sufficiently to allow the correspondent to send any telegrams at all. Information came through confusedly in the course of the next few hours, and the Farishtabad Europeans exercised their brains and lungs in enunciating plan after plan of the operations, which required continual modification as fresh details arrived. The contentions at the Club would have alarmed any one who was not accustomed

to hear Major Saundersfoot shouting down his opponents, and pouring scorn on any who professed to enjoy exclusive information from the field, but at length a workable, or at any rate a possible, scheme was agreed upon.

The advance had been made, it was generally decided, in three directions. On the extreme left, a strong force of Sappers and Mounted Infantry, starting with the greatest secrecy, and travelling light, had made a night march which brought them within striking distance of the railway from Agpur to Ranjitgarh, at a spot some fifty miles to the south-west of the latter city. Working eastwards, they destroyed systematically a section of the line, removing the rails and sleepers altogether and sending them into camp, and completing the destruction by letting the canal water flow over the plain. Having been joined by reinforcements, the column disappeared in a northerly direction, leaving a small detachment in a fortified village to give warning if any attempt should be made from Agpur to repair the damage done and operate against Lord Williams's rear.

The Viceroy himself, with the main army, began, after the reconnaissance on St Patrick's Day, a slow but impressive advance upon Ranjitgarh, his left resting on the Ghara. He had heavy artillery with him, and was obviously contemplating a formal siege. His advanced-guard was soon threatening the lines occupying the site of what had been the Tej Singh cantonments, while his cavalry made demonstrations, now in one quarter, now in another, calculated to keep the Scythian force in the city on the alert, but without coming to close quarters with it. A winter in Ranjitgarh had done much to impair the spirit—or at any rate the mobility—of the light cavalry which had achieved such feats on the Scythian side at the beginning of the war, and the British Mounted Infantry had contrived to learn a good deal from the enemy. But these small outpost affairs, if exciting to those who took part in them, were not alarming, and the Scyth-

ians, behind their lines, awaited Lord Williams's onslaught with much confidence. The task of the garrison was to delay him until reinforcements could reach them through Ethiopia, and every day they gained made his ultimate defeat more sure. They were reckoning, however, without certain developments which were taking place on the right, in the district lying north of the Ghara and south-east of Nanakpur, but separated from that city by the river Sidr.

This had been more or less a debatable land since the British retreat behind the Ghara, for though the railway bridge at Jalun had been blown up, and the district thus isolated from British territory, it included a small but pugnacious native state which had refused to acquiesce in the change of masters. There were not wanting, of course, people who said that Rajah Hira Singh's sole idea was to achieve independence for himself, but if this was the case, he relinquished it as soon as Lord Williams's appointment was announced. While maintaining a hollow peace with the Scythians established in Nanakpur, his state served almost as a British outpost, so useful was he in sending information of projected raids. One good turn deserves another, and during the months that preceded Lord Williams's advance, it was observed that much hard work had not made the officers encamped round Paniati less keen on sport. They took hunting leave as often as they could get it, and their destination was always the hospitable capital of Rajah Hira Singh. They crossed the Ghara in various informal ways at which the authorities winked, though technically they were entirely unacquainted with them, and on their return they were unanimous in declaring they had enjoyed splendid sport, though there was a singular absence of trophies of the chase from their baggage. This may, of course, have been due to the difficulty of transport, but the outposts on the eastern side of Nanakpur were not favourite stations with the Scythian invaders. They complained that certain "rebels" harassed them so persistently that there was no leading

a quiet life, and never had the manners to allow themselves to be caught.

From an intelligence station and base of guerilla warfare, Hira Singh's territory was now transformed into a screen. His sturdy, aggressive warriors shut off from Nanakpur all news of what was passing at Paniati and Jalun, and in their ardour even treated rather roughly one or two British secret agents who were slow in revealing their identity, not knowing whether they had fallen among friends or foes. Behind this screen was achieved one of the greatest engineering triumphs of the war. Far away, at one of the great arsenals, huge girders had been preparing, for the purpose, it was vaguely understood, of repairing at some future time one of the wrecked bridges. These were hurried suddenly to the front, and handed over to an army of Sappers, who had made due preparation for their arrival. There was a night made hideous with clanging and a babel of tongues, and weird with many lights reflected in the river. At sunset the piers of the bridge had stood bare and ghastly and meaningless, at daybreak they were united by steel spans, and trucks were running across on a skeleton railway. The Jalun-Nanakpur line itself had suffered almost equally at the hands of the Scythians and Hira Singh's men, and at those of the country-people, who had artlessly appropriated sleepers for fuel and rails for many useful purposes, with a feeling that the misfortunes of the time were not entirely devoid of a brighter side. While the Sappers set to work to repair it, the advanced-guard of the Paniati force entered Hira Singh's state. The enterprising ruler had commandeered all boats plying on the Sidr within his jurisdiction, and by their aid a night attack was made on the Scythian outpost at Sidr Bridge which left it in the hands of the assailants.

The way to Nanakpur lay open, provided that the Scythians there could be surprised before they had time to blow up the railway, and Sir James Germaine held a record which marked him out as the fittest

person to deal with such an emergency. Men who had served in South Africa nodded knowingly when the cavalry division was ordered across country to the north-east, to seize the railway from Nicha, and sweep down it upon Nanakpur. The rest of the army was being hurried up from Paniati—along the half-repaired railway, in ekkas, on horses, mules, donkeys, any and every description of animal that could be ridden, and—another reminiscence of South Africa—it was living on the country. There was no waiting for tents or supplies, and the railway was reached in time. Before the Scythians in Nanakpur had recovered from their surprise at the news from Sidr Bridge, they learned that the British were advancing not only thence, but down the line from Nicha. The city had not, like Ranjitgarh, been turned into a fortified position, and the people were raging over an attempted desecration of the Golden Temple, the palladium of the whole Granthi faith, by a party of drunken cavalymen. The climate was distinctly unhealthy, it was agreed, and with a hurried attempt to blow up the line behind them, the Scythian force retired on Ranjitgarh. The damage done was quickly repaired, and the British followed, to be stopped, of course, by a more effectual obstacle before Tej Singh could be reached, but arriving sufficiently near to Ranjitgarh to threaten it from the east, as Lord Williams was doing from the south and south-west.

The Scythians regarded their huge earthworks complacently, and anticipated a long but not particularly troublesome siege, since their guns, though inferior in weight to those of the British, were superior in rapidity of fire. Direct communication with Agpur was cut off, but the line of retreat and of reinforcement, along the railway to Payab and Shah Bagh, lay open, as long as the British army was on the south of the Bari river, and there the Scythians intended it should remain. But they had left out of their calculations the mobile force which had destroyed the connection with Agpur and disappeared into the unknown. That

force reappeared, on the north bank of the Bari this time, and threatened the line to the frontier. Its numbers were multiplied indefinitely by rumour and apprehension, and the Scythians believed their communications seriously jeopardised. There was no news of the reinforcements which ought by this time to have reached Shah Bagh, and from the accounts of the disturbed state of Ethiopia, it was quite likely they might not get through for some time. The force with which Ranjitgarh was held was by no means excessive for the extent of earthworks which had been constructed by the forced labour of the population during the winter, and to patrol adequately the immense length of line behind it would weaken it dangerously. As the British had discovered in the previous autumn, it is much easier to cut a long line of communications than to keep it open.

The Scythian general's reply to this salient fact was a tremendous effort to annihilate the intrusive force on the north of the river before his intention could be divined by Lord Williams and General Germaine on the south. A second time he failed to reckon with a factor which had cost the British dear, the tendency of human nature to worship the rising sun. Every inhabitant of Ranjitgarh who had not compromised himself too deeply for pardon, and a good many who had, was anxious to insure against the future by giving every possible help to Lord Williams without present danger to his own skin, and news of the projected movement reached the British Generals in good time by several channels. As a result, the unusual activity of the Scythian artillery, and the sortie made against an exposed point, did not deceive them. When the sortie was repulsed, the pursuit was pushed home, and the Tej Singh lines remained in the hands of the British, while the mobile force on the north of the river eluded annihilation by retreating behind a barrier of flooded land. Conjecture was rife in the British camp that night. Would the Scythians retreat, or would they strengthen their second line and fight

desperately behind it? The mobile force precipitated a decision by a successful raid on the line northwards, in which they blew up a bridge. The party engaged were cut off almost to a man, but the lesson was sufficient. During the next few days hot fighting went on round Ranjitgarh, though neither party seemed to give or gain an inch. The detached column continued to threaten the line, but no more, for it was known that the Scythians were sending away their stores and hospitals. Then the troops began to follow, and presently the British were faced only by a rearguard, which held stubbornly to the passage of the Bari, and blew up the bridge behind it when at length it retired. Lord Williams was in Ranjitgarh.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BRIDGE OF BIHET.

"THIS is Williams all over!" said Major Saundersfoot at the Farishtabad Club. "Always edging the enemy out of his positions and letting him get clear away, almost without fighting. Why in the world didn't he send a stronger force across the Bari, and bring the Scythians to a stand?"

"Because he hasn't the men," said a transport officer. "Do you realise what the butcher's bill would have been, with the Scythians at bay like that? We might have cut off their retreat, but it would have cost us half the army. Napoleon could sacrifice armies deliberately, as the Xipanguese can now. We can't afford it."

Major Saundersfoot growled angrily. "What's the good?" he demanded. "We must bring them to a stand at last, or they'll merely come again another day."

"Don't you think Bills knows that? He will bring them to a stand, but it will be between us and the Xipanguese, up near Iskandarbagh somewhere. I expect to see him work them, work them, work them, northwards bit by bit with as little fighting as possible. A big surrender will suit him as well as a big battle."

"We are too squeamish nowadays," grumbled Major Saundersfoot. "When Williams goes out to fight, he's always thinking how many lives he can save."

"Well, no one can accuse you medicals of that sort

of squeamishness," said his antagonist soothingly. "Better apply for a berth in the Xipanguese A.M.D., hadn't you? Plenty of work there."

"If we had been told ten years ago that we should need the help of the Xipanguese to keep India, we should have looked pleased," said another man peaceably.

"Well, it seems a choice between keeping it with them, and losing it without them," said the transport officer. "If we won't maintain an army big enough to do our proper work, we must get some one else's to help us—for a consideration."

"But I say, you know," said the peaceable man, "all that business last year had no right to happen. If Bills and Germaine can drive back the Scythians now, without reinforcements—or with next to none—why didn't we keep them out then?"

"Are you asking for information?" demanded the other. "Because we were taken at a disadvantage, of course—any one will tell you that. The people's minds had been disturbed, the native army was discontented, the Government at home was too fond of peace to let us be prepared for war. Now we have a Government that means business, and a Viceroy sent out to end the war, with a C.-in-C. who will back him up. But even now we can't get out of the wood without the Xipanguese."

"But why are we invariably taken at a disadvantage?" broke in Major Saundersfoot. "It always happens."

"Ah, that I can't say, unless it is that we prefer a few soldiers to look at in peace-time to a big army for use in war. Who's that *chit* for, boy?"

"For the Major Sahib," and the servant presented Major Saundersfoot with an official-looking document.

"Ah, I've got my route," he said, after glancing at it. "The hospital is to move on to Ranjitgarh, and take up its old quarters at the Antony School—follow in Williams's triumphant footsteps, in fact."

"Don't be too sure," said the transport officer, not unnaturally irritated by Major Saundersfoot's air of being indispensable at the front. "This thing mayn't be a walk-over all along. Wait till Bills has shepherded the Scythians up to Payab."

"No need to wait for that," said a man who had just come in. "We've got a bad check before Agpur."

"What's that?" demanded Major Saundersfoot. "Winshill been playing the fool again? He ought to have been superseded after that Magersfontein business last hot weather."

"So he would have been, but—there are ways and means," said the new arrival. "Williams's orders showed pretty clearly what he thinks of him."

"What were they?" asked several voices.

"He was to advance to Dostabad, so as to keep the Scythians and their work round Agpur under observation, but to remain strictly on the defensive, and on no account to risk a frontal attack."

"But there was no distrust there. It's simply Williams's usual dodge, as we were saying just now. He or Germaine would come down upon the Scythians in the rear while Winshill held them in front, and force them out of the place without any fighting to speak of. Well, what has gone wrong?"

"I imagine Winshill and the Second Army would rather fight than not. They have last year's affair to wipe out, you see. And so they've made things a good deal worse."

"Good heavens, man! can't you say what has happened?"

"Why, it seems that Winshill discovered—perhaps he was meant to discover it—that the Scythians had no intention of waiting to be forced out. They preferred to choose their own time and retire in good order. That meant, of course, that once they got to Dera Galib they would have the road clear to Payab, and they could ask nothing better than

for Bills to come down to Agpur and chase them."

"He could cut them off, though," said some one. "There's a cross-country line—starts from somewhere between Nizamabad and Bihet."

"Aga Harun," said the transport officer. "But the line's a rotten affair—wanders hither and thither, full of holes and corners, absolutely invites an enemy to meddle with it. I'd far rather take an army across by road. Beg your pardon, old chap."

"You say you want to hear what's happened, and you won't let me tell you," complained the narrator, and some smoothing down was necessary before he would consent to go on. "Well, you see Winhill's point. There was no chance of the Scythians allowing themselves to be worked out of Agpur and up into the wild country, so Williams's plan was spoilt already. More than that, if they succeeded in getting to Payab, and uniting with their friends from Ranjitgarh, H.E. would have a very nasty nut to crack. But if they could be stopped, it would mean a pitched battle for the Second Army—just what it was thirsting for, instead of hanging on at the tail of the enemy's rearguard and worrying him. It was the sort of time—don't you know?—when the born soldier reveals himself by rising superior to his orders, and Winhill decided to reveal him."

"But what about the telegraph?"

"Scythians had made a sortie—most conveniently—and cut the wires. The theory was that they had done it to prevent Winhill's warning Williams of the intended evacuation, of course, but I don't believe Nelson was ever so thankful for his blind eye as Winhill was for that sortie. Anyhow, he attacked, and failed."

"Same old trap?" asked some one cynically.

"No, they avoided that—weren't to be caught again. Fact is, the Scythians in Agpur must have made a much better use of their winter than the Ranjitgarh people, or else they had some sort of military genius among them. They had mines, and wire entangle-

ments, and all the devilry that one heard of first in actual war at Port Horatio. Our men—white and black—are not Xipanguese, you know. They made rush after rush, and even gained a little ground, but the nearer they got, the more intolerable the fire became, and at last—well, they refused to face it any longer. It seemed as if they were no nearer than at the beginning, and those that could get away did.”

“One way of wiping out last year’s disgrace!” said Major Saundersfoot. “What will happen after this?”

“It will spoil all Bills’s plans for him,” said the man who had brought the news.

“Some people won’t be sorry for that,” said the transport officer. “They’d rather see him unsuccessful than themselves proved false prophets. They objected to his appointment, they hated his leading the army himself, they are always mocking at him for slowness and caution. Now I suppose they’ll gloat.”

“No one will gloat who knows anything,” said the peaceable man. “What I’m afraid of is, that this news will play the very mischief at home. Our people haven’t learnt to harden their hearts and take defeat calmly yet.”

He was unfortunately near the truth, for the campaign had so far been sadly lacking in the spectacular elements which capture the public sympathy. The task set before Lord Williams and General Germaine was complicated by many factors the importance of which would not suggest itself to the casual observer. The immense distances to be traversed, the interruption of all the ordinary means of communication, and the anxiety of the general populace to discern the winning side and adopt that, served both to increase the difficulties, and to render news hard to obtain and dangerous to disseminate. It was not easy to realise how precarious the situation really was, for the recovery of Ranjitgarh had caused a momentary frenzy of loyalty to spread over India. Addresses of con-

gratulation poured in, and the British officials at Shamsabad, far to the south, who had unostentatiously put the Residency in a state of defence and prepared to sell their lives dearly, found the very troops whose weapons they had expected to see turned against them eager to join Lord Williams's army. Now came this decisive check, with its appalling casualty list and its lamentable moral effect—as lamentable in England as in India.

The "peace-at-any-price" party at home, whether in Parliament or in the country generally, had only been scotched, not killed, by the burst of patriotic feeling which had swept Lord Mulliner and Lord Cooke into office, and carried Lord Williams and his veterans back to India. The House of Commons was still largely composed of those members who had watched passively the evacuation of Gajnipur and the retreat behind the Ghara, and the present was the opportunity they chose for lifting up their voices. The recall of Lord Williams and the abandonment of Granthistan were openly advocated, and the compact with the Xipanguese was seized upon to brand Lord Mulliner as an inveterate upholder of "yellow labour." That unity of the nation in the face of danger, of which it is so gratifying to read when the danger is past, but which is often sadly conspicuous by its absence at the moment, was still to seek, and the fate of the Mulliner Ministry—and incidentally, that of India—trembled in the balance. Irby and Borrell and their supporters worked day and night, writing, wire-pulling, addressing meetings, pressing forward the organisation of the Defence Clubs. Mr Critten, moved with mighty wrath, wrote a poem in which he told his countrymen so many home-truths that, though dejected even to meekness at the moment, they developed an ungrateful thirst for his blood. The public mind was in the grip of an invincible nervousness, and a ministerial defeat must have followed, but for the news that the plan of the campaign in India had been modified. Sir James Germaine was coming

down on Agpur from the rear, while Lord Williams remained, though with a dangerously depleted following, to keep the Ranjitgarh Scythians on the run. That the change was due to political rather than military exigencies could not be denied, and the Opposition papers indulged in much rejoicing and reprobation over it, but there was no difference of opinion between Prime Minister and Viceroy. The thing had to be done. A defeat in the House of Commons at this moment would mean either a General Election or a return to office of the party of retreat, the one bringing about the removal of Lord Cooke from the War Office on the very threshold of his work, and the other affording an unequalled opportunity to the Continental enemy who was still dividing his attention between England in difficulties and Pannonia on the verge of disintegration.

The bad news from Agpur had caused a certain amount of unavoidable delay in the progress of Lord Williams's force. The duty of pursuing the retreating Scythians had necessarily been committed to a comparatively weak advanced-guard, which was able to harass them, but could do little more. The Viceroy's intention had been to follow on the heels of the enemy so closely as to give them no time to prepare positions for defence or to destroy the means of communication, forcing them to put forth all their powers if they were to reach Payab in a condition short of utter demoralisation. But when he had seen one portion of his army start from Nizamabad to attack Agpur from the east, while another was entraining with all possible speed at Aga Harun to take the cross-country route and come down upon it from the north, and part of the Second Army had been ordered to retrace its steps, and crossing the river, march up towards Dera Galib in order to co-operate from the south-west, it was inevitable that the course of events should have changed for the worse on his right.

The railway between Ranjitgarh and Aga Harun was blocked by Sir James Germaine's force on its

roundabout way to Agpur, so that the reinforcements which were being hurried up from Farishtabad and Paniati could not proceed. The advanced-guard, which had clung gallantly to the heels of the retreating Scythians, had been brought to a standstill by the river Bihet, which was crossed by a double bridge for road and rail. The bridge was not destroyed, but the Scythian rearguard was holding the town of Bihet, on the farther bank, in strong force, and had mounted in batteries constructed during the winter the heavy artillery brought from Ranjitgarh. The British force, concentrated in and around Zibgarh, on the southern bank, was faced with the fact that the bridge afforded the only means of crossing, since the Scythians had collected and destroyed all the boats that could be found. In order to carry out Lord Williams's favourite manœuvre of a flank attack, it would be necessary for the troops detailed for the purpose to return to Aga Harun, take the railway—the same line that was already choked with the force destined to operate against Agpur from the north—to Sharifpur, some fifty miles lower down the river, and march against the rear of the Bihet defences by road. And time was pressing. If the road had been clear, Lord Williams, while himself remaining at Zibgarh, could have ordered his supports, now eating their hearts out at Ranjitgarh and Nanakpur, to take this route by Aga Harun and Sharifpur, but they might have been in another continent, for all the possibility there was of using them at the moment. Meanwhile, every day's delay was a clear gain to the Scythians on the north of the Bihet. From Bihet northwards there would be innumerable opportunities of delaying a pursuer by blowing up roads and railways and defending strategic points, and once past Payab, the Scythians might hold the Kunji Pass until reinforcements reached them—if anything went wrong with Rustam Khan's operations in Ethiopia.

Notwithstanding the need for haste, the natural bent of Lord Williams's mind would probably have led him

to hold the Scythian rearguard at Bihet while waiting for his supports, had not the feeling among his subordinates in favour of an immediate attack become very marked. There was no doubt that a decisive success—a showy feat of arms, in fact—would be of immense service both in India and at home, and those entitled to offer advice pressed this upon the Viceroy in season and out of season, so far overcoming his reluctance that he consented at last to call a council of war. The news was received with great enthusiasm by the troops, for all were anxious to fight, and there was little doubt which way the verdict would go.

“Glad we’ve brought things to a point at last,” said a staff-officer to Mr Brooke. “Bills is slow, there’s no doubt of it. This is a move in the right direction.”

“Clive called a council of war once,” said Mr Brooke slowly.

“Ah, so he did. Good precedent!”

“But he acted in opposition to its finding, you know.”

“Beastly unfair of him. What was the good of holding it?”

“To find out what not to do, I suppose. But I think we shall try this job.”

“Yes, of course. We daren’t lose more time.”

“Oh, that’s not the reason—the chief reason, at any rate. It’s because the Hercynian Staff have said the British can’t bring off a frontal attack, and because the Xipanguese would do it in our place.”

“Well, and we’ll show ’em we can.” The staff-officer became aware, apparently, that he was talking to a mere volunteer, and stalked away.

Mr Brooke’s forecast was correct. The council of war reported in favour of a direct attack, and the Viceroy accepted its decision. The way was to be prepared by artillery fire, and then a picked force was to rush the redoubt which commanded the end of the bridge. For hours the artillery duel continued, until two of the Scythian batteries had been silenced, but the British fire continued until it seemed that no human

being could be alive among the tumbled masses of earth and mud-brick across the river. Then the infantry advanced, greeted by an occasional bullet from the Scythian bank, as if only a rifleman here and there had retained his post under the hail of missiles. When half the bridge had been crossed, the British artillery ceased firing, for fear of injuring the advancing column, and the spectators on the British bank watched the khaki-coloured mass moving on, as it seemed, irresistibly. Then there was an instantaneous transformation scene. The khaki ranks appeared to crumple and wither, even before the sound of firing reached the men who were watching eagerly through their glasses from the British shore. The ruined Scythian earth-works were alive with riflemen, who had poured in a deadly fire at a range which made the poorest marksman effective. The horror of the spectacle was deepened by the apparent inexplicability of the catastrophe. There was no smoke, no flame, the enemy were barely distinguishable from the heaps of earth behind which they crouched. Only, instead of the mass of men pressing forward with a steady swing, there were blots and splashes of khaki, with ominous crimson shadows, in the roadway, and tiny isolated figures were seeking what cover they could find, and making a hopelessly feeble reply to the terrible fire.

The artillery fire from the British side broke out again, and supports were hurried forward across the bridge. But once again, as soon as the guns were silent, the riflemen poured in their deadly hail, this time at a longer range, but with a result almost equally fatal. It seemed that no one could cross that bridge of death, but when volunteers were invited for a third attempt, more than the necessary number were at once forthcoming, European and native starting forward side by side. This time the method of attack was somewhat modified. After a preliminary pounding by the artillery, the column advanced very gradually, taking advantage of such poor cover as was available, and lying down and firing whenever the head of an

enemy was visible. Arrived at the scene of the failure of the second attempt, half of the men remained to fire, while the rest ran forward, to gain the ground strewn with the bodies of the first attacking party.

"Why, there's a lame man among them!" said the old officer who was watching the fight at Lord Williams's elbow. The two had been comrades for many years, and Sir John Fitzjames, known to all the army as "Jacky," was accompanying his friend through one more campaign.

"A lame man? So there is—a European, and not a regular. It can't be young Arbuthnot! Can you see if it's a Shikari?"

"Shikari right enough. But why not young Arbuthnot?"

"Married the day we left Farishtabad—and I promised his wife to take care of him. What possessed him to go?"

"Fellow that saved your life in December; I remember. Well, 'how can man die better'——?"

"He ought to have thought of his wife," said the Viceroy impatiently. "Ah, look there!" His hands shook as he altered the focus of the glass, for the field of vision seemed to have become suddenly blurred. The running men had lain down in their turn, using as a dreadful rampart the bodies of those killed in the first rush, and the rear rank were running forward between them. A spasmodic outburst of firing from the redoubt had been answered by one from the recumbent men on the bridge, and an officer in the group behind Lord Williams and Sir John had remarked approvingly that the Scythian fire was not one quarter so heavy as before—"the lyddite must have smoked 'em out a bit at last." But as he said it, the scene changed again. The outlines of the redoubt and the battered earthworks grew faint, as if a haze had swept before them, the bridge and the figures upon it—moving, recumbent, and motionless—rose in the air, then settled down into a great swirl of water, and a deafening report explained the sight. The Scythians

had blown up the bridge, with the attacking party upon it.

There was no question now of further attempts to cross the river. An officer was sent forward with a white flag to arrange for a twelve hours' armistice, and rescuing parties set out, launching collapsible boats hastily inflated, or climbing along the ruins of the bridge, to look for the survivors. It was just sunset when the armistice was arranged, and during the greater part of the night lights flickered from broken pier to pier, as the bearer companies went backwards and forwards, or a surgeon crept perilously along a half-shattered span to attend to a man too desperately wounded to be moved as he was. Lord Williams, at the shore end, encouraged the workers and stimulated them to fresh efforts, and it was not until the small hours that he yielded to Sir John's persistent representations that all the wounded and dead that could be recovered had been brought back.

"But there is still a light moving at the end there," he cried, breaking from his friend's restraining hand.

"Major Brooke of the Shikaris, sir," supplied an aide-de-camp. "His cousin was one of the forlorn hope, and his body hasn't been found. Most of the poor fellows must have been swept away by the river, but he won't give up looking for him."

"Arbuthnot, of course," said the Viceroy heavily. "See that his name doesn't go down as missing until we know something certain," he added sharply. "And wake me as soon as it begins to get light."

In the brief morning twilight the two old men climbed again to the roof from which they had watched the evening before. Sir John adjusted the Viceroy's binoculars, knowing well what he was waiting for—the moment of weird, almost unnatural clearness of vision that follows sunrise.

"Jacky!" The officers in the rear smiled involuntarily as the Viceroy's voice, high and thin with eagerness, uttered the familiar name—"there's a man—a body—on the pier nearest the redoubt. I saw

a patch of khaki plainly. He must be saved. Send——”

“Brooke’s off,” said Sir John, as a boat shot out from a landing-stage some distance to the right. There were two men rowing, in a style seldom seen on Indian rivers, and a third sat in the bows.

“That’s Folkington in the white shirt,” said a civilian in the group. “He was up at Univ. with me.”

“And the one in khaki must be the Padri who does odd jobs for the Shikaris,” said some one else. “Cambridge man—rowed for the Varsity, I know. Meadows his name is.”

“How much longer does the armistice last?” the Viceroy was asking anxiously of Sir John. “Up in ten minutes? We must have it extended. They have no Red Cross flag on the boat.”

He gave a sharp order, and an aide-de-camp dashed down towards the bridge. The force of the current was driving the boat into a diagonal course, and the efforts of the rowers were directed towards bringing her as nearly as possible above the pier, so that she might drift down to it gently. It was a moment of eager suspense for the onlookers, for the slightest miscalculation would have dashed her against the pier, and flung her occupants into the water, but she was brought dexterously into a position where some slight shelter was to be had, and the two rowers held her there with all their might, while the third man clambered up the ruin above them. To the anxious eyes watching him, he seemed to occupy an eternity of time in fastening a rope round the khaki-clad form, which they could see plainly when he lifted it up, and moving it to the edge, but the business of lowering it into the boat was far more lengthy. The rowers durst not loose their hold of the pier, lest the boat should be swept away, and their companion was obliged to lower the body almost unaided. At the last moment there was a slip which almost swamped the boat, but after the gasp of alarm that marked it a cheer broke out from the British shore when it was

seen that the three men and their helpless passenger were safe. Comparatively safe only, however, for the boat had now to run between two of the piers, and strike for the shore to the left of the bridge. As she appeared on the other side, a burst of firing from the Scythian bank greeted her, answered by a roar of execration from the British. The armistice, which no one had thought of during the last few minutes of tension, was over, and Lord Williams's emissary was still climbing out towards the broken end of the bridge, waving his white flag whenever he stopped to take breath. The rowers bent to their oars, and the boat pursued her diagonal course, followed by more shots, the riflemen running out on the roadway in front of the redoubt and taking deliberate aim at her over the parapet. An eager Gunner, whose battery was close at hand, stood fretting on the next roof to that occupied by Lord Williams and his staff, and the Viceroy looked across at him.

"Teach 'em manners, if you please!" he said, and never did a man reach his post in better time. A hail of shrapnel fell among the Scythian marksmen, and they fired no more at the boat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

THE hospital at the Antony School was once more in full working order. The Scythians had used the place as a hospital during their occupation of the city, so that it had escaped the destruction which, whether intentionally or owing to carelessness, overtook most of the other public buildings, but it had required the ministrations of a whole army of sweepers before it could satisfy Major Saundersfoot, and the orderlies rarely referred to their predecessors otherwise than as "them pigs." The operations which had ended in the recovery of the city were responsible for a large number of wounded, and with the increasing heat of the weather cases of enteric began to multiply, so that the nurses had their hands full. Sister M'Kay was an excellent organiser, and the work was so well distributed that no one had broken down yet, but those who knew the country were beginning to remember with dismay that there were now no hill stations available in Granthistan, and to look forward apprehensively to a hot weather spent in Ranjitgarh.

"The Superintendent would like to see you in the office, Sister," said one of the orderlies, meeting Janie as she entered the ward one morning.

"About that inoculation for enteric, I suppose," said Janie to Sister Lawson, who had preceded her. "I thought they had decided there was no need for

us to be done, but some of them do make such a fad of it."

"Oh yes—no doubt," said Sister Lawson nervously. "Better go at once, dear. It—it mightn't be that, you know."

Something in the tone caught Janie's attention, and she saw that Sister Lawson's eyes had a frightened look. "What—what——?" she began, but her tongue refused its office, and she turned and ran like a whirlwind through the long corridors. In the office, talking to Sister M'Kay, stood Mr Brooke, and when Janie burst in upon them and saw him, she guessed the worst. She could not speak, but he answered the question in her face.

"No, not killed, but badly wounded, and wants you. I have come to take you to him."

"Yes, I'm ready," said Janie. She had a curious feeling that she had known all along that this summons would come, that she was absolutely prepared to obey it. She made a step towards the door. "Do let us come," she said, and she heard herself speaking as if it was some one else. "Why are we waiting?"

If she had been left to herself, she would have started that moment as she was, in cap and apron, without *topi* or luggage, but Mr Brooke looked at her compassionately.

"We cannot start till noon," he said. "I will call for you then."

"Three hours wasted!" said Janie, as if he was to blame.

"Nonsense, Jenny!" said Sister M'Kay. "You have to get ready, you know. We'll pack her things for her," she added, turning to Mr Brooke. "Come for her at half-past eleven, please."

Janie never knew how the hours of that morning passed. She was in her room, somehow, and the others came in and out, advising, encouraging, trying to rouse her to take some interest in her packing. Sister Lawson, who had lost her brother in the recapture of Ranjitgarh, Sister Carlisle, whose lover had

been killed before Agpur, and a new recruit, whose father, one of the returned veterans, was lying severely wounded in hospital at Nanakpur—all tried to forget their own griefs and comfort her.

"You know, dear, you must take plenty of things," murmured Sister Lawson, finding Janie standing with stony eyes before an array of clothes which the last helper had laid out on the bed. "You are to stay and nurse him, and you won't be able to get anything."

"Oh, why can't we start at once?" cried Janie. "All this dreadful, dreadful waste of time!"

"It isn't waste," said Sister Lawson patiently, beginning to pack the nearest bag. "You couldn't go without any luggage, dear. Will you have your foulard?"

"Oh, I don't know! I can't think of that sort of thing. Put in what you like, Lawsie. I think I shall walk to the station."

"And get sunstroke before starting?" said Sister M'Kay, coming in. "Sit down in that chair, Jenny, and don't you dare to move. I'll put in what I think you'll want. Don't mind us."

The permission was unnecessary, for Janie was scarcely conscious of their existence. They noticed that she put on her *topi* with feverish eagerness an hour before it was time to start, and then waited near the window to listen for Mr Brooke, but it was all done with fixed eyes that seemed to be watching something at a distance. When they kissed her at last, and bade her good-bye with hopeful, cheering words, her lips quivered for the first time.

"Oh, don't make me cry," she entreated. "I must be strong. Oh, Lawsie, pray that I may be in time!"

Once in the train, she made Mr Brooke tell her what he could, or would. She learned nothing from him of the rescue from the broken bridge, and his account of the surgeon's report of Arbuthnot's injuries did not satisfy her, but she knew that things must be very bad.

"But was he never conscious?" she asked anxiously, after hearing of the fever brought on by the night of exposure.

"Only for a moment. Then he looked at me and said, 'Janie—she promised,' and I went at once to Lord Williams and got leave to fetch you. I have a pass signed by him, which will get us through anywhere."

The train was crowded with troops, but Mr Brooke had secured a compartment for Janie, and towards evening he advised her to lie down and get what sleep she could. She looked at him with dumb protest. To sit rigidly upright and note each landmark passed was all she felt it possible to do.

"You must be strong," he said, repeating her own words. "You will have to nurse him—to do night work. If you broke down, it might cost you his life."

"Are you saying that because you believe it, or just to help me?" she asked him, with desperate boldness, searching his inscrutable face. "Do you really think we shall find him alive?"

"I do, honestly. I trust and believe that you will not only find him alive, but nurse him back to health. But to do that, you must take care of yourself."

"Then I will," said Janie, and she succeeded in getting a little sleep, fighting down the horrible thought which seemed to set itself to the accompaniment of the clanking of the train, "What—if—he— What—if—he—is—dead—already?" and returned upon her whenever she woke with a start. The train moved slowly, and there were many stops and delays, but in the course of the next day they reached Aga Harun—now a scene of chaos—where Mr Brooke left Janie under the care of the station-master's Eurasian wife, who had contrived to come up with her husband in defiance of all regulations, while he went to see what chance there was of their getting any farther that night. The remembrance of the hours spent in the small close room, vibrating with every train that passed, while the stout dark

lady talked incessantly, was like a nightmare to Janie afterwards. The state of the case was plain enough. In the little town and around it troops were everywhere, and they were still arriving by road and rail from Ranjitgarh on the south and Zibgarh on the north, twice as fast as they could be despatched by train to Sharifpur. All the available rolling stock was needed for use on the Sharifpur line, and Mr Brooke was seriously contemplating making use of the Viceroy's pass to commandeer a cart and horses and thus go on by road, when, after night had fallen, he discovered a return train—chiefly composed of empty trucks—being made up for Zibgarh. A young surgeon was going up in charge of a Röntgen Rays apparatus and other medical stores, and on hearing Mr Brooke's story he volunteered to give up his own quarters in the brake-van to Janie, and invited Mr Brooke to be his companion in a truck with an awning over it. It was after midnight when they started, and their train progressed with a curious jerkiness and frequent stoppages, which its passengers found maddening, but which daylight proved to be merely precautionary, since the dawn showed them another train coming towards them on the same line. Some one had blundered, it was clear, but the fact did not throw any light upon the present situation. The approaching train proved to be conveying part of a native regiment to Aga Harun, and the young European officer in charge met the surgeon on the neutral ground between the two engines, where they exchanged acrimonious remarks, while the conversation of their respective engine-drivers, who had also called a parley, was tinged with something more than acrimony. The officer was quite certain that both lines ought to have been clear for the passage of troop-trains, the surgeon that so long as he was upon his proper line, any intruding train was bound to back to the nearest siding, and allow him to pass. Mr Brooke tried in vain to arrange a compromise, and a native officer, called in to corroborate

some assertion of his superior's, solemnly proposed to refer the matter to the arbitrament of fate. With a well-founded confidence in the greater weight of the troop-train, he suggested that the two engines should advance towards each other, and see which could push the other back. The disputants were too hotly engaged to perceive the humour of the thing, and were still hurling their "orders" and "matters of life and death" at each other's heads, when Janie climbed down from the brake-van in which she had passed the night, and threw herself into the fray.

"Oh, please, can't we go on?" she asked the surgeon. "Need you keep us talking here?" she inquired reproachfully of the other officer. "My husband is dying—perhaps he will die now, while we are waiting. If the train has to stop here, we must go down to the road and walk."

"My orders are to get to Aga Harun as quickly as possible," he said apologetically.

"And mine are to get to Zibgarh," snapped the surgeon.

"Change trains," suggested Mr Brooke, and the proposal commended itself to the other men, who were by this time ashamed of their contest, but did not see how to bring it to an end. The troops were transferred to the empty trucks of the Aga Harun train, and the medical stores to that which had come from Zibgarh, while the passengers of the former collected their belongings thankfully and moved likewise. Their train was able to start again long before the other, but they parted from the officer the best of friends. During the remainder of the journey Janie was haunted by the fear that they might meet other trains and incur fresh delays, but the line was happily clear. At the Zibgarh station horses were waiting, and she and Mr Brooke mounted and rode out to the hospital.

"His wife at last?" said Colonel Garry, looking up at the trembling little woman, scarcely recognisable through dust, heat, and fatigue, who almost threw

herself from her horse at his feet before the hospital tents. "It's about time. We had to put him by himself; he was distracting the other patients—worse than the brain-fever bird."

"You won't wait a moment—or rest?" suggested Mr Brooke, but Janie shook off his hand.

"Oh no, no!" she panted. "I must go to him at once."

They followed the surgeon until he stopped and raised a warning finger, and Janie heard a sound that will always haunt her at moments of mental strain—Arbuthnot's voice, raised in a curious harsh tone, uttering and repeating perpetually, as if by machinery, the one word "Janie!" "Janie, Janie, Janie!" it said, never waiting for an answer, but she replied by a cry of agony, "Jock, I am here, here!" She ran into the tent, pushed aside an astonished orderly, and took his place beside the bed. Stooping forward, she lifted the bandaged head to her shoulder, holding it there as if the tall man had been a child. "Jock, my darling, I have come," she whispered softly.

The fever had lost its power, leaving Arbuthnot absolutely helpless, barely able to follow Janie with his eyes as she moved about. Despite her objections, he had insisted on demanding from Colonel Garry the extent of his injuries, for from the first an inspection of the dressings had told her trained eye a tale which she hoped against hope might not be true. But when the wounded man, throwing all his strength into a husky whisper, asked when he would be fit for service again, the surgeon laughed, though not mirthfully.

"The fellow has scarcely a sound bone in his body, and he talks of rejoining his regiment!" he said. "Be content to lie quiet and let your wife fuss over you—that'll give you your best chance."

"I can't do anything but lie quiet—you've tied me up so," whispered Arbuthnot with an attempt at a smile. "But I need not lie quiet for the rest of my life, I hope?"

"When a man has been blown up sky-high and dashed down on rough masonry, and been rescued by the skin of his teeth after a night in the open, all he has to think about is to be thankful he's alive," said Colonel Garry oracularly. "You owe it to Mrs Arbuthnot that you didn't go off in the fever, so show your gratitude, if you are grateful, by being patient and not worrying her."

He went out, and for fear of crying, Janie made believe to gloat over her husband's helplessness. "It had to be this, you see," she said. "If you had only had an arm broken, or anything of that kind, you would have wanted to go back to the war before you were well, but now I have you all to myself."

His eyes sought hers. "Janie, does it mean—that I shall always be a cripple?"

"If you are, you will have me for a crutch." She smiled at him resolutely. "And when we get old, you shall go about in a bath-chair, with medal-ribbons on your coat like Lord Williams's, and people will tell one another that you were one of the men who rushed the bridge of Bihet."

"I don't think you could joke about it if you thought it was true," he murmured weakly.

"No, indeed, you wouldn't think I could, would you?" she asked, winking the tears away. "You didn't know what a heartless wife you had. Oh, Jock, if you had only got back your senses a day earlier! Do you know that Lord Williams came and looked at you before he went away? He spoke to you, but you didn't know him. But you knew me," she added inconsequently. "If you hadn't—if you had gone on calling for me in that dreadful voice, I think I should have gone mad."

"Poor little woman! Tell me about it. Was it Brooke who fetched you?" and she sat by his side, relieved to have diverted his thoughts from the subject of his injuries, and industriously bestowed a humorous complexion on as many of the incidents of that dreadful journey as would allow of it.

"And when Lord Williams came to see you, Jock, he said how glad he was that you were better—that the fever was not so high, I mean—but it was only to be expected. Wasn't that nice of him? And he said he was very angry with you for volunteering, and he supposed you expected to get the Victoria Cross, but you ought to have thought of me. And I said I hoped it was the thought of me that made you volunteer, and he said that in that case it was I who deserved the Cross, and as I couldn't get it, neither of us should. But he said we were not to be anxious about the future, for he should make it his business to see to that. Which ought to mean something good in the Intelligence Department, don't you think?"

She was passing her hand lightly over his forehead, as she spoke in a low soothing voice, and he smiled at her faintly as his eyes closed. She waited until she was sure he was asleep, and then rose and darted to the tent-door. Her hands were clenched and her face drawn with pain as she stood fighting down the sobs which would betray her.

"Would God it could have happened to me instead!" she moaned. "My dear, brave, splendid Jock! If he ever learns to wish that I had not come, and he had died in the fever—— Oh God, show me how to help him to bear it!"

She struggled with herself for a minute or two, then composed her face sufficiently to answer the salutation of an officer who passed, but Mr Brooke read the traces of the conflict when he came up a few moments later.

"Not worse again, I hope?" he asked kindly.

"Oh no, better; but—he is beginning to ask what is the matter with him. And I made Colonel Garry tell me last night—he must always be lame—quite lame, not just a limp—even if the spine has escaped, as he hopes. Oh, what good can it do that such things should happen?" with a despairing plunge into generalities. "Nearly every family in England in mourning, and so many men maimed for life—and I

suppose it is just as bad in Scythia. And it might all have been avoided !”

“If the people at home would realise that, it might be worth it all,” said Mr Brooke. “But it is a lesson that England never has learnt yet. I doubt if anything will break us of our habit of disdainng preparation and trusting to muddle through.”

“And in this case it looks as if we weren’t even going to muddle through,” said Janie bitterly.

He looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. “Do you know,” he said, in his most deliberate tones, “I am just beginning to think we have been judging Williams a little bit hastily? This infamous subordination of military to political exigencies—the whole army are agreed that it is infamous, if they are agreed on nothing else—it seems to me that it’s possible there has been nothing of the kind.”

“But General Germaine and all the best troops have been detached for Agpur, instead of following up the Scythians here,” objected Janie.

“So it was announced, and so it appeared in the home papers, and so, no doubt, it was reported to the Scythians. But doesn’t it seem to you a little unnecessary—a little unlike Williams—to lock up the best part of two armies round a town which is of no particular strategical importance as soon as its communications have been cut?”

“But that is what Sir James Germaine was to do—to cut the communications on the north.”

“Yes, but the line is so long that to cut it about midway is as good as cutting it close to Agpur, for the Scythians have no depots between Dera Galib and Maqulkot. The Second Army ought to be competent to deal with Dera Galib, and when that is in our hands, Agpur is practically surrounded. Why send Germaine down to do what is done already?”

“Well, but he is gone to do it.”

“No, excuse me; I think he is pretending to be gone to do it—much to the contentment of the Scythians in Agpur. They flatter themselves that they have made

the place pretty well impregnable, and probably count on delaying us there until they are relieved from the north. But if, instead of wasting men in assaults on their lines, we content ourselves with cutting their communications and keeping them in, they may wait until they are starved out or we have time to deal with them. If they had realised the truth, their best plan would have been to evacuate the place and retire as the Ranjitgarh troops are doing, uniting with them somewhere south of Payab—or perhaps holding the line from Gajnipur to Maqulkot. But for once the papers have done us good service by putting them on the wrong scent. There's no chance now of their getting up to Maqulkot before Germaine could cut them off, and the Second Army men are within a day or two of Dera Galib. I think you'll find that instead of turning south, Germaine will go north, and make a dash for Maqulkot and Payab."

"But even if he got to Payab, and held the bridge—I suppose the Scythians have rebuilt it—what good would it be? They took it from us before."

"By surprise, you remember. They will hardly have a chance of doing that again. And as to the good of it—well, you must put together various bits of information like a puzzle, as I have been doing the last day or two. There is trouble in Scythian Central Asia—we have had an inkling of it for some time, but since the Xipanguese landed at Haidar Ghat, it can't be concealed any longer. If they can defeat the Xipanguese in Iran they are all right; but if they let them enter Ethiopia, or if the Xipanguese defeat them, Central Asia will be in a blaze. If that doesn't bring about a revolution in European Scythia, any attempt to send more troops to India would certainly do it, and therefore, if the Xipanguese are up to their usual form, I imagine we have only those already here to deal with."

"You have begun your puzzle at the far end," said Janie, interested in spite of herself. "I see that, and I see our end, but there's so much between."

"True, there are Rustam Khan and his subjects, who have no objection to loyalty when there is a chance of plundering their Scythian friends. Do you notice that we hear no more of any Scythians coming through Kubbet-ul-Haj? That way is blocked, I fancy. Well, if Rustam Khan, with such help as we can give him from Shalkot, can manage the same sort of thing this side of Iskandarbagh, there will be no more Scythian reinforcements for the present."

"There are so many ifs!" sighed Janie.

"There are, indeed. *If* the Xipanguese can get up to Rahat—they are quite a month off from it at present; *if* we can keep the Scythians now in Ethiopia from overflowing into India; *if* we can capture Dera Galib and Maqulkot and Payab, and catch the Ranjitgarh Scythians between Williams and Germaine; and I suppose we must add, *if* the Emperor of Pannonia remains in the same state of health, no better and no worse, we may hope to be discussing terms of peace about this time next year."

"At any rate, you have given me something to talk about to Jock," said Janie. "If he begins to ask inconvenient questions again I shall overwhelm him with all your wonderful prophecies."

"You will take him down to Ranjitgarh as soon as he can be moved, I suppose?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think this place isn't quite so hot, but you can get things more easily there. But we are both under orders, you know, and must go where we are sent. If you could only conquer a hill-station or two on your way north!"

"Bala, for instance?" His face was suddenly grave. "Ah, I'm afraid the King's writ won't run in the hills for some time yet."

"The moment it does, you and Jock and I will go and find Burree," said Janie impulsively.

"Please God! It doesn't bear thinking about, does it?—her being left all these months alone with those helpless natives. But every foot we drive the Scythians back is a step towards her."

"What was it about some one trying to kill you?" she asked suddenly. "Colonel Garry said something about it, but I couldn't make it out."

"Why, it's a curious thing, but one would think I had some personal enemy—which is a luxury I never dreamed of possessing. I have been shot at twice from the ruins of the bridge, and when I was riding alone outside the camp yesterday, three ruffians, who might have risen out of the ground, made a desperate attack on me. If a Lancer patrol hadn't come up in the nick of time, I should hardly be here to-day."

"Were the men Ghazis?"

"No, ordinary tribesmen. They ought to have been taken alive and questioned, but the Lancers were not in a merciful mood, and I was really not in a condition to take any interest in the matter until they got me out from under my horse."

"But what can it mean?"

"Well, I have a theory—but it excites such ribald mirth whenever I mention it that I only broach it to you in strict confidence. I think they must take me for Lord Williams. We are about the same height."

"But there isn't the slightest likeness between you otherwise. And the Shikari badge on your helmet is so conspicuous—I always know a man of Jock's regiment quite a long way off. Besides, surely they would know that Lord Williams wouldn't ride about alone?"

"Evidently my theory hasn't a leg to stand on. Well, then, I see no reason whatever for the attacks. It must merely be that the irreconcilables among the tribesmen are anxious to wipe out any officer they see, and pure coincidence has given me more than my share of their kind attentions. I ought to enjoy complete immunity henceforth as compensation."

"I hope you will, for Burree's sake," said Janie earnestly. "And now I must go back to my poor boy. I suppose I shall hardly see you again?"

"I shall look round in the morning if I can, but

I believe we start early. Good-bye. Be sure to write to me at any time if I can help you in any way, and let me know how Jock goes on. When we meet next——”

“The hurly-burly will be done, and the battle lost and won?” asked Janie, trying to smile.

“I don’t know. We’ll hope so.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

KEEPING THE WOLF FROM THE DOOR.

THE hurly-burly was not quite done when Mr Brooke and Janie met again three months later, but more than one battle had been lost and won in the meantime. Arbuthnot and his wife were at Ranjitgarh, quartered in three little rooms on the ground-floor of the Antony Hospital, and very thankful for the refuge, for the city was under martial law, and European inhabitants unconnected with the military occupation were not encouraged. Janie was employed once more as supernumerary nurse, and her husband had undertaken the charge of the hospital accounts, much to the disgust of the fat Babu who had been steadily accumulating a fortune under the suspicious but necessarily intermittent supervision of Sister M'Kay. An ex-policeman to scrutinise his contracts was a horror that had never beset Mr Mookerjee in his wildest dreams, and the tears he shed might have softened a heart of stone, but Arbuthnot carried through his work with grim determination. His old active life was closed and done with, but if books and maps and ledgers were to be his portion in the future, instead of men and mountains, he would accept them without whining. He knew the worst now. A turn up and down the verandah, leaning heavily on Janie's shoulder, was his limit, and matters would probably never be much better. He might in time be able to manage that distance alone, but he would always be "hideously lame," as he phrased it to himself. He did not

venture to use the term in Janie's hearing, nor did he ever utter aloud the reflection which had haunted him at first, that he ought never to have married her, or that it would have been better if she had left him to die at Zibgarh. It would have been sheer cruelty to say it, conscious as he was that his very helplessness and dependence made him inexpressibly dearer to her, and that so long as she believed him fairly contented she was absolutely happy. Therefore he pretended industriously to be contented, and welcomed any hard work that might make the pretence more of a reality, with something very like heroism. Janie, who guessed at his struggles, though she could not realise their bitterness, was quite sure it was heroism.

While the Europeans at Ranjitgarh were baked in the hot weather and boiled in the rains, military operations continued farther north under difficulties which recalled those of the Central India Campaign in the Mutiny. Mr Brooke's forecast of Lord Williams's intentions had proved correct, and Sir James Germaine was now master of Maqulkot and Payab. The enemy at Payab had surrendered, whereas those from Maqulkot had escaped into the hills, but General Germaine did not trouble himself about the fugitives, any more than about the Scythians holding Shah Bagh. The tribes might be trusted to look after them, since loot was loot, from whomsoever it might be obtained, and deputations were already coming in to protest that loyalty to the British Raj which had so conspicuously failed in the hour of trial.

Lord Williams's progress northwards was much more leisurely, since the Scythian rearguard contested every possible position, and any bridge or piece of railway left undamaged could only be regarded as a trap. True to the humanitarian instincts which were such a stumbling-block to his English and Hercynian critics, his aim was to hustle the retreating Scythians northwards until, caught between his force and that of General Germaine, they must recognise that the odds

against them were overwhelming, and that surrender was the only course. But just south of Gajnipur, with the road to Bala open behind them as a line of retreat, they turned to bay in a determined attempt to destroy Lord Williams's army before Sir James Germaine could come to his assistance. The affair was planned with considerable ingenuity, for the stubborn rearguard appeared to have been seized with panic, and the retreat to be degenerating into a rout, so that a less cautious commander might have been led into the headlong pursuit which would have left his army dispersed over miles of difficult country. But the Viceroy was well served by his scouts, and these revealed the existence of strong Scythian columns lying in wait on either flank, whereupon, to the astonishment and disgust of his troops, he stopped short in the pursuit and threw himself into a small town with the euphonious name of Hutchinsabad, which was hastily placed in a state of defence. His force had been diminished by the necessity of clearing the country on either side from isolated bands of Scythians and tribesmen, but the railway was being reconstructed behind him, and reinforcements from the First Army were panting to come up with the foe. He contented himself, therefore, with repelling the desperate attempts made to force him out of his position, and after a week's siege the advance of the railway from the south, and of General Germaine, like the traditional Blücher, from the north, automatically brought about his relief. The Scythians stole away in the night, leaving their camp-fires burning and their heavy guns in position, and firing into the town to the last, to keep up the illusion of their presence. But they were no longer an army. It appeared that each commander had been left to take what seemed to him the best course, for some turned north towards the river, taking the roundabout route of the British retreat the year before, so as to avoid General Germaine, some made a dash at once for Bala, others sought refuge in the

mountainous border country, and some prudent souls, tired of war, waited among the ruins of the Gajnipur forts until they should be able to surrender. The work before the British Generals was now rather to clear the country of marauding bands than to face an army in the field. A week after the dispersion of the Scythian Ranjitgarh force came the news that the Xipanguese had captured Rahat, and that the retreating Scythians were finding themselves confronted by a widespread insurrection in their own territory.

Among those reported "dangerously wounded" after the siege of Hutchinsabad was Mr Brooke, but he was sufficiently recovered to be among those sent down to Ranjitgarh by the first hospital train that traversed the reconstructed railway. Strictly speaking, the Antony Hospital was not his place, but Major Saundersfoot, at Janie's entreaty, "worked the trick," as he said, and found quarters for him not far from the Arbuthnots.

"Though really, Jenny," said Sister M'Kay, "I must say I didn't expect all your relations by marriage to come and take up their abode here. I suppose we couldn't have had you without your husband, and besides, I feel I owe him a debt of gratitude whenever I see the scowl on old Mookerjee's face, but when it comes to his first cousin once removed——"

"But it helps you to get a great deal more work out of me," said Janie, laughing. "I can leave my husband far more happily now. He and his cousin are such good friends that they are quite content to sit and smoke together for hours without saying a word—just like my Burree and me."

"Especially the smoking!" said Sister M'Kay. "Not that you ever sat an hour with your friend without talking, Jenny—you needn't tell me."

Returning to her rooms for tiffin one day, Janie found that her two wounded heroes had a visitor—a young Scythian officer with his arm in a sling.

He sprang up as she entered, and made her an elaborate bow.

"Madame has forgotten me, I fear," he said in French. "I have inquired perpetually since I was taken prisoner about my kind nurse, and I discover at last that she continues her career of mercy here. I had not anticipated the pleasure of meeting Monsieur her husband, but he has made me most kindly welcome."

"You are a good testimonial for St Martin's, Count Eugene," said Janie. "I should hardly have expected you to walk so well. You will stay to tiffin, of course? You did not know my husband in Bala, I think?" she stopped suddenly, remembering that if he had seen Arbuthnot, it must have been in the disguise of Ghulam Qadir—"but you must often have met Major Brooke?"

"I ought to congratulate Major Brooke on possessing a charmed life," said Count Eugene, with another bow; "for he had at any rate two very determined enemies."

"Ah, this sounds interesting," said Mr Brooke.

"Can you wonder at it, monsieur? My poor friend Pavel Arseniévitsh—what have you not made him suffer! It was his unpleasant duty to arrest Madame as an accomplice in your escape—you know that? By an excusable act of chivalry, he permits her to remain at large one night, and in that night she also escapes. The blusterer Colonel Dhiyan Singh, who was associated with him in the duty, reports his conduct to Pavel's uncle, the General, and he is severely reprimanded. Presently good news arrives from an outpost far down the road. The Sister has been arrested, with her servant, who is believed to be a spy. Imagine the relief of Pavel Arseniévitsh, the credit heaped upon Captain Andréieff, who had the good sense to detain the fugitives! Promotion—perhaps a decoration—awaits him. But the Sister escapes again—this time by means of a cunning plot conceived and carried out by one Brooke. From henceforth the *rusé* M. Brooke

has two enemies instead of one, and when he reappears at the head of a corps who carry a badge of leopard skin in the helmet, it is a matter of congratulation that he is to be recognised anywhere."

"But," said Janie, very pale, "what did they try to do? He was attacked by natives once, and shot at by Scythian privates twice. You can't mean that Prince Pavel and the captain encouraged any one to try and kill him particularly? It would have been murder."

"It was murder," said Mr Brooke. "There is no other word for the death of poor Meadows."

"In that case, madame," said Count Eugene stiffly, "you will pardon me if I don't answer your question. I am not here to bring accusations of murder against my brother-officers."

Conversation languished during the remainder of the meal. Janie tried to ask questions about Eleanor and the hospital, but as Arbuthnot had seen both since Count Eugene had been discharged cured, she gained little fresh information, and it was a relief to all when the Scythian bowed himself out. The moment Janie was alone with her husband, she demanded what Mr Brooke had meant.

"I should say there can't be a doubt that one or other of those fellows had offered a reward to any one who killed Brooke," he answered. "He was wounded first in a skirmish outside Hutchinsabad, and at his request his men propped him up against a tree, and went on after the enemy. Poor Meadows, when he heard of the skirmish, went out to look for the wounded, and came hurrying along with bandages. He was tying up Brooke's leg when about a dozen Scythians rode down upon them. Meadows never would carry even a revolver, you know, for fear of being tempted to use it, but he snatched Brooke's and fired off all the chambers at them. But they deliberately rode the two down, hacking at them as they passed. It's a miracle that Brooke is alive. He says himself that if Meadows hadn't fallen across him, so that he was partially protected, he wouldn't be."

"I think," said Janie, with kindling eyes, "that the Bala Mission ought to be as proud of Mr Meadows as any regiment of its heroes. There ought to be a tablet in the Sheonath School to keep his boys in memory of it. And if it hadn't been for me, Jock——"

"Brooke might not have incurred this special enmity, and Meadows might be alive still?" said Arbuthnot. "Oh, I understand. We will do it together, Janie, when the war is over and the mission is in working order again—if there are any boys left to come to school, or any missionaries to keep it."

They saw no more of Count Eugene, but news of the Sheonath missionaries came unexpectedly in a day or two. Major Saundersfoot brought in a freshly printed extra of the 'Pen and Sword' one evening, and laid it hastily on the table.

"I can't stay," he said, "but I thought you'd like to know that the Bala hostages have been released, and are safe at Gajnipur. Full list of names, they say."

Janie rushed upon the paper and tore it open. Her eye ran hurriedly down the list—the Resident and his family and staff, visitors, British officers attached to Bala regiments, officials of state departments, missionaries, merchants—with here and there an ominous parenthesis, "Died, ——," and a date.

"Burree's name is not here. She has not come!" she cried, in bitter disappointment.

"It may be merely a mistake. I should say myself that the list of missionaries is not a full one," said Mr Brooke, scarcely less agitated.

"Let us telegraph to Weaver," said Arbuthnot. "His name is here, right enough, and he would know."

It seemed almost impossible to wait for the answer to the telegram, for the wires were still largely reserved for official messages, and it was not until the next evening that they read:—

"Dr Weston remains in Bala. Am starting for Ranjitgarh. Will call.—WEAVER."

Two days later the missionary, worn and prematurely grey, and clad in curious native-made clothes, presented himself at the Arbuthnots' rooms. Janie hardly knew him, so great was the change in the spruce dark-haired medical man who had exercised a beneficent tyranny in and around the best hospital in all North India, and she began to realise what this year and a half of captivity had meant to the men and women who had known nothing of the progress of affairs in the outside world but as it was revealed to them by taunting gaolers.

"Miss Weston refused to leave," he said, when he had greeted them. "Perhaps I ought to have insisted on her coming, but everything was arranged in such a hurry that there was little time for argument, and I could hardly have brought her by force."

"She wouldn't leave our people, I suppose?" said Janie.

"Yes, she refused to come without them, and our escort declared it was impossible to bring them. We were not free agents, or I would have tried, at any rate, whether it could not be done."

"Tell us how you got away at all," said Arbuthnot.

"Indeed, I hardly know. We were at Sheonath, quartered in the prison and the houses round, where we had been for a year. We lost thirteen from fever this hot weather— But that wasn't what I was talking about. We had noticed a change in the behaviour of our guards—a sort of anxiety to curry favour with us behind each other's backs—and we thought it must mean British successes, but they still threatened us with being taken up into the mountains. Then one day—we think it must have been when the news arrived that General Germaine had captured Payab, the mob attacked the prison, vowing death to us. We tore up boards and got hold of anything that could serve as a weapon, and prepared to sell our lives dearly, but when the mob had actually got into the courtyard, the Rajah and his guards arrived, and fairly rode them down. We were taken from the prison that

night, with the assurance that we were no longer safe there, which we could well believe, and lodged in one of the Rajah's palaces, with proper food given us, and clothes, and the Rajah's secretary coming every day to ask if we had anything to complain of. At last he came at ten o'clock one night to say that the mob were ready to attack the palace itself, and that the only chance for our lives was to send us out of the country at once. Of course we thought that meant the mountains, but he explained that the Rajah was ready to hand us over to Lord William, if the Resident would guarantee him his life and throne. We could promise nothing about the throne, of course, but we thought it was safe to guarantee him his life, and we all signed a sort of testimonial."

"But the young ruffian is a traitor and a murderer!" cried Arbuthnot. "He deserves no mercy."

"The Resident thought he had been led away by his cousin—the half-caste," said Dr Weaver. "I suppose it is true that George Brown became a Mohammedan to conciliate the Agpur mullahs, in the hope that the Scythians would put him on the *gaddi*?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but I don't believe they had the slightest intention of doing it, and now he would probably give a good deal to get safely out of Agpur."

"It is his brother who acts as the Rajah's secretary."

"What, Alfred Brown—who led the Second Army into the first Agpur disaster? And he shares in the Rajah's amnesty, I suppose? Well, of course you knew nothing about it, but I think those two beauties have done themselves remarkably well."

"I must say," protested Dr Weaver uneasily, "that he behaved very well to us. It nearly came to a fight with a body of Scythian fugitives whom we met on the road to Gajnipur. They insisted on our returning to Bala with them, but the Resident took command of the escort at Alfred Brown's request, and we forced our way through."

"Then the Bala people are anxious to be friendly now?" said Janie eagerly. "And every one says that

Scythia must make peace soon. Jock, you will let me go up and fetch Burree and our people?"

"You? Certainly not," said Arbuthnot decisively. But Janie looked round upon them with heightened colour.

"You can't go, and Mr Brooke can't, but I can. I know the way—at least, you can tell me the part I don't know—and Lord Williams will give me an escort, and we will take mules and things. There is no fear of the Scythians if we keep to the secret paths."

"If your husband takes my advice he will not tell you, and I certainly shall not," said Mr Brooke, in a hard voice.

"And you forget," said Dr Weaver, "that the Scythians have blown up the road behind them in several places as they retreated. It would be impossible to repair it in time to reach St Martin's this autumn. I saw myself that Miss Weston was well supplied, and the Rajah will do what he can for her for his own sake. We can do nothing from this end, or I should not be here."

Eleanor faced the winter—her second in Bala without Janie—with a stout heart and good hope. Granthistan was British once more, that was certain, and with the spring she would see the sight for which she had so long wearied—the khaki regiments coming up the road. With them would come Janie and Mr Brooke, certainly, and possibly Arbuthnot, who must surely have declared his feelings to Janie by this time. How much they would have to tell her! For a year and a half she had been without news from home, deprived of letters, papers, parcels, all the links that unite the exile with his kin. Her life had been less eventful than theirs—a squalid fight with destitution at first, before the arrival of the timely help secured by Arbuthnot, and since then a combination of hospital work with the labours of a general relieving agency. She smiled at Dr Weaver's idea that it was possible for her to leave her little community without a leader;

it was less possible now than ever. Her flock of waifs and strays had increased continually in numbers, for the frequent quarrels between the Scythians and the villagers were responsible for many orphans, and several *pardah* women from the neighbourhood had fled to the hospital compound for refuge. "The English are pigs," cried one excited fugitive, as she clung to Eleanor's feet, "but these men are pig-devils; they have no shame." Some of these outsiders she was able to pass on to the care of relatives or friends, but others must perforce be added to the list of regular inhabitants of the compound. Owing to this increase in numbers, Eleanor had felt some anxiety about winter provision until the stores promised by Dr Weaver arrived under the charge of the zealous and obliging Mr Alfred Brown, for the Scythian Sanitary Department did not undertake to furnish her with supplies when the hospital was out of quarantine.

Throughout the month of September there was scarcely a day that did not bring a crowd of weary, dispirited fugitives toiling up the road. They could be seen from the hospital walls, but much to Eleanor's relief, they made no attempt to approach St Martin's, pressing on instead to the Rajah's hunting-box and the camp near it. Dr Schmidt—between whom and Eleanor truce had reigned since he left off boasting of British defeats and she had magnanimously refrained from asserting British successes—sent up a polite request now and then for the loan of some drug or instrument, but there was nothing to suggest that the Scythians were in danger of anything worse than a shortage of medical stores—such a shortage as had existed for some time at St Martin's. It was, therefore, a great surprise to Eleanor to be summoned one morning to the roof by eager voices to see what must apparently be the whole Scythian force on the march up the road. There could hardly be more than three thousand men in all, but they had large numbers of baggage-animals, and men and beasts alike were heavily laden. Embroidered draperies, ivory carvings,

gold and silver vessels, could be distinguished in the loads, and Miss D'Costa called Eleanor's attention to the columns of smoke which rose from three points in the rear of the advancing force.

"They have burnt the Rajah's hunting-palace and the two villages in the valley," she said, "and they are carrying the loot away with them. Will they come here, Miss Weston? What can we do?"

"They must be going back to Bala-tarin," said Eleanor; "but it is too late. They will be overtaken by the winter before they can get there."

"They are coming here!" moaned Miss D'Costa, turning white. Eleanor laid an encouraging hand on her shoulder.

"We need not be afraid. They may only want us to look after their sick," she said, and went down to the gate. It was Dr Schmidt who stood there, more surly and blustering than she had seen him for months. His errand was soon told. The force was marching with insufficient supplies, and none were to be obtained on the road to Bala-tarin. It was known that she had lately laid in large stores, and they must be handed over. Otherwise, St Martin's would share the fate of the plundered villages, to which the surgeon pointed.

"But it is our food for the winter. What are we to do?" cried Eleanor.

"You must lay in fresh stores. There will be no difficulty for you. The Durbar refuse us supplies unless we surrender—to them! They have thrown off the mask now—these creatures whom we came to liberate. We negotiated with them until we learned that they were plotting to surround us and provoke a conflict in which they might massacre all but two or three, who would be saved to hand over to the British in the spring. Then we gave up the hope of nerving them to a last resistance, and determined to return to our own territory, seizing what supplies we could find on the way."

"But you can never cross the passes so late in the

year! The first snow may come any day. After all, if you did surrender, you would only be enduring for six months what the hostages have suffered for a year and a half."

"We do not surrender, we Scythians. We retreat, and drag our enemy after us to his destruction. Nor do we fear snow and ice, as the soft English do. Can you imagine, madam"—with sudden passion—"that we will make ourselves objects of scorn here, where we have reigned like kings for a year and a half? You must give up those stores. Shall Europeans, soldiers, starve while black women and children are fed? And be careful. We need fuel as well, and there is wood in abundance in your roofs and doors."

Reluctantly Eleanor led the way to the rat-proof godown where the precious grain was stored, and saw it carried out in sacks, jars, baskets—anything that would contain it. Then Dr Schmidt proceeded to the surgery, and ruthlessly appropriated such things as he stood in need of, advising her sardonically to send in a claim against the Scythian Government on the conclusion of peace. As she stood watching him depart laden, a violent explosion, echoed back on all sides by the mountains, nearly threw her down the steps. She saved herself by clutching at a pillar, and called out to reassure the crowd of frightened women and children who had rushed together, with the vague instinct of seeking safety in her presence, though they were certain the hospital was being bombarded. Her first thought was that the Scythians must be exploding the ammunition that they could not carry with them, but a visit to the roof showed her that the matter was more serious. It was the road that they had blown up, at a spot where for some three hundred yards it had been blasted out of the rock with incredible labour, and the link with the Empire and civilisation was broken.

Down the steep path from the upper village troops of wailing women and children came hurrying. One or two carried cooking vessels hastily snatched up, but most had evidently fled with nothing but what they

wore. Running downstairs and out at the gate, Eleanor called out to ask them what was the matter, but they were too much terrified to wait or answer. At last an elderly woman, who had been in the hospital as a patient, ventured to stop.

"Miss Sahib, the sons of Shaitan have stolen all our possessions, and pulled the wood out of our houses to carry with them, and they are forcing our men to follow them to the land of death as coolies. Woe is me! in the days of the English there was no forced labour, but now our sons will die in the snow on the mountain-road. Even the Great House have they destroyed, Miss Sahib, and the Begum Sahiba sits among the ruins, cursing them."

She hurried on after the rest, who were taking the path by which Mr Brooke and Arbuthnot had reached the hospital on the night which proved to be the beginning of sorrows, and Eleanor turned to consider what was to be done. In view of the imminent approach of winter, a supply of provisions was the first consideration, and she despatched Abdul Husain down the path with a letter to Mr Alfred Brown, at Sheonath or wherever he might be found. Stragglers from the Scythian ranks were still arriving, but they were generally fairly well loaded, and went on straight up the road as soon as they reached it. When no more could be seen, Eleanor called Vashti, and they set out for the upper village, now a scene of desolation, heaps of loose stones marking the spot where each roughly constructed house had stood. From the Begum's house a view could be obtained of the rear of the Scythian column as it wound out of sight up the road, and here, precariously supported on a pile of ruins, sat the old lady, cursing the destroyers with an awful definiteness that made Eleanor's blood run cold. She spoke like a prophetess, describing the perils of the mountain journey, the rock-falls, the icy whirlwinds, the overwhelming onslaught of the snow. She pictured the survivors struggling on against ever greater and greater difficulties, till no man looked

behind when his neighbour fell by the way and called to him for help, and at last the snow covered all alike. In a final burst of vengeful joy she looked forward to the scene the road would present in the spring, when the melting snow disclosed the long line of corpses of men and animals, extending over many miles, and the wild beasts would hurry thither from the whole mountain country, and all the vultures of India, to enjoy a horrible feast. The faithful Barakat, crouching near her mistress, punctuated her prophecies with plaintive appeals to her to calm herself and come down, of which the Begum took no notice whatever, but as the last Scythian disappeared in the distance, she stood up and flung out her right arm with a magnificent gesture, as though devoting her enemies to destruction. Then she collapsed, and Eleanor, taking the direction of affairs out of the hands of the willing Barakat, bade the two women help her to bring the Begum to the hospital. The small shrunken form was scarcely heavier than a child's, and they carried it down the steep path and in at the gate of St Martin's. Not till then did it occur to Eleanor that she had added two to the number of her dependants, and that at the outside there was only a week's provision in the place.

The first snow fell that night—merely a few flakes, which the children laughed with pleasure to see, but the earnest of the long winter. Eleanor put every one unostentatiously on an allowance, and calculated that they ought just to be able to hold out until Abdul Husain's return. But Abdul Husain did not return. Whether he had encountered one of the last Scythian parties, and been impressed by them as a carrier, whether he had met with some accident on the mountain-side, or evil had befallen him among the angry and destitute inhabitants of the valley, she was not to know, but the relief he was to have brought did not come. Much against their will, she sent out next the only two male servants remaining on the compound, the gardener and a groom, but they also

vanished into the unknown. Thus baffled, she took Vashti into council, and the girl suggested applying to the Begum, who might possibly have been able to keep some hoard of food untouched by the spoiler. The proposal was not a welcome one, for since her return to consciousness the old lady had shown plainly that she regarded her removal to the hospital as a gross liberty. She was too weak to get up and walk out, but she could use her little strength to turn to the wall and pull her *chadar* over her face when Eleanor came near her. But there was no time to lose, and Barakat, diplomatically approached, undertook to sound her mistress. A wild outburst of wrath was the consequence, and listening nurses conveyed to Eleanor that the Begum had declared all in the hospital should starve, and she herself with them, before she would tell them where to find a single seer of grain. But Barakat's deferential urging of Arbuthnot's repeated request for kindness to his friends, which she pleaded in a meek depressed voice, without emotion and apparently without intermission, wore down the old lady's resolution at last. She admitted that she had laid up a provision of corn in a certain chamber approached by a trap-door in the floor of the room where she had been wont to receive her visitors, and this might now be used, provided that only Eleanor and Barakat descended into the vault.

Taking with them the strongest among the women on the compound to help move the stones and rubbish which covered the floor, the two ambassadors went to the Great House. The task of finding the trap-door was a toilsome one, but when it was found, Barakat knew how it was opened, and led the way down with an assured step. The grain was stored in huge earthen jars, and one of these had in some way got broken, the fragments and the corn lying scattered on the rocky floor. Barakat pushed it partly aside with her foot, revealing the corner of another trap-door, and Eleanor understood that she was looking at the Begum's treasury, but neither of them said a word. They

swept up the corn from the floor, supplying its place with the dust which lay thick elsewhere, and began to fill from the jars the baskets which the women above lowered down to them. Several visits of a like kind followed—not by day, lest unfriendly or thievish eyes should be on the watch, nor at night, lest the necessary lights should attract notice, but in the dusk of the misty mornings. Then the vault was carefully covered again, and Eleanor's mind was at rest for the present.

Winter had set in early this year, and the hospital was completely isolated. To Eleanor there was something weird in the absolute silence and loneliness around, beyond the walls which enclosed her chattering, quarrelling household. Not one man from the Scythian column had returned down the road which it could hardly have been possible to traverse in time, none of the former inhabitants of the village had dared the icy slopes to seek news of home or relatives. She durst not allow those around her to perceive the horror with which the solitude gripped her at times, after she had once seen the dumb, unreasoning terror which crept into their eyes when they realised that she was frightened. She set herself resolutely to efface the impression, devoting her energies to keeping every one on the place busy, as strenuously as any commander of an Arctic expedition.

Christmas came, and a few hoarded delicacies in the way of tinned foods were brought out—the last save what was kept for the Begum, whose strength was manifestly failing. She died on the last night of the old year, when the children and converts were singing hymns in the smaller ward of the hospital. Summoned by Vashti, Eleanor left them to Miss D'Costa, and slipped out noiselessly. The Begum was quite collected, and no milder than heretofore. With all her old fierceness, she made Eleanor swear on the Gospels, and Barakat on the Koran, that while they lived, no one should take possession of her ruined house and its contents but Arbuthnot, "the light of my eyes,

the son of my heart," and desired them to turn her face towards Mecca. For her, it was a great concession when she murmured that the Mullahs said Christianity was a soul-destroying religion, but that judging it by some Christians, she considered it was not so bad; and Eleanor accepted the words as an acknowledgment of what she had done. They had neither tools nor strength to dig a grave in the frozen earth, but they cleared away the snow and laid the swathed form in it until the spring—the first of several such temporary funerals.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KEYS ARE TURNED.

THE Begum's hoarded corn was coming to an end, the roofs of the verandahs had been torn down for fuel, but the end of winter was not yet in sight. The children, quaint figures in garments made out of curtains and other unusual fabrics, were beginning to look pinched and to show languor. As yet they had not felt actual scarcity, but the food was unvarying and lacking in nourishment. But they would soon recover health and strength when the spring came, thought Eleanor, conscious all the while that a further supply of this same tasteless and monotonous grain was likely to be an unattainable blessing. The snow was hard and firm now, and she proposed to Vashti that they should venture down to the lower village in search of food. None of the other women would have dared to come, and Vashti only acquiesced because she felt the invitation a challenge. She had all the plainswoman's horror of snow, and followed in Eleanor's footsteps in deadly fear, while the other women stood looking after them and wailing. The descent was easier than Eleanor had dared to hope, and with a good many slips and falls, they reached the foot of the hill safely. Only one building was standing, and to it they made their way. It was roofless, and the snow lay thick on the charred walls, but in one corner, away from which the snow had drifted, lay a man, apparently asleep. Vashti

shrieked and fled, but Eleanor, after calling out to him in vain, entered the place. The man was a Scythian soldier, dead. His body showed no wound, and in a heavy bundle at his side, with a number of trinkets and other loot, were some *chapatis*, so that he had not died from starvation. Evidently he had lingered behind the column plundering, and following it alone, had been frozen to death in the roofless house. Eleanor covered the face reverently, and went out. Vashti, equally afraid to return alone and to remain, was at last induced to join her, and they went about among the ruins. A frozen *chapati* here, a handful of grain there, was all they could find—not enough to fill the baskets they had brought. Looking down the mountain towards the snow-covered ruins of the hunting-palace and the village near it, they saw there was no hope of reaching them, for the bridge which had spanned the river was gone. With much difficulty they retraced their steps up the hill, and dragged themselves back to the hospital with their tale of cold comfort. During the ascent Eleanor had slipped on a rock and injured her ankle, and Vashti was obliged to leave the baskets for one of the others to fetch, and help her on.

The enforced rest which followed tried Eleanor terribly. Weakened by insufficient food and warmth, she found herself oppressed by a haunting horror—what if she should die and leave her flock without a leader? In vain she told herself that since God had placed her there in charge of them, He would not take her away—the thought returned and held her. It was the contented helplessness of the people that made her despair; they would sit down and wait patiently for death, without a murmur against God or a reproach against her, but not one of them seemed capable of initiating any movement for relief. Even the vigorous Nāni spoke quite happily of dying now that the Miss Sahib could no longer go out and look for food, and Vashti had been too much frightened by the sight of the dead Scythian to venture

out again. In this emergency it was little Miss D'Costa, of all people, who came to the rescue.

"I think there might be some food left in the village under the Look-out, Miss Weston," she said, with an unusual vivacity which did not hide her trembling. "If you approve, I will take Mai Sarah and go and see. It is her native place, you know, and she could tell me where the people would be likely to conceal their stores."

"Oh, if you could!" cried Eleanor. "You are not afraid?"

"Oh no, not at all!" protested Miss D'Costa airily, but the effort was too great. "I am very much afraid, Miss Weston," she confessed with quivering lips; "but God will take care of us. It is for the poor children's sake we are going."

The hours passed slowly while the two were gone, though Eleanor held a school examination to divert the children's minds. Not until night was falling were the two women seen returning, Mai Sarah's sturdy form bent under a heavy sack, Miss D'Costa carrying a laden basket. In the joy and bustle consequent on the arrival of supplies, there was at first no time to ask for details of the day's doings, but when the welcome meal had been prepared—merely *chapatis* again, from the coarse flour Miss D'Costa had carried—Eleanor noticed that neither of the adventurers volunteered any. Mai Sarah, always taciturn, replied with nothing but grunts when she was questioned, and there was horror in Miss D'Costa's eyes. She sat with the food untouched before her, and refused to eat.

"I can't, Miss Weston. There is blood upon it," she broke out at last. Horrified, Eleanor asked what she meant, and the story came out with a rush.

"We were coming out of the house where we found the corn, Miss Weston; it was on the edge of the mountain. A man sprang out from behind the next house, with a great sword, and shouted to us to give it up. Mai Sarah was just lifting the sack upon her

shoulders, and she swung it round—indeed, indeed, Miss Weston, I am sure she only meant to protect herself from the sword—but it struck the man and he fell—we could hear him falling, down, down, down. I wished to leave the sack behind, but Mai Sarah refused to obey me—and this is the food.”

“There is no hope that he might be alive if we went and looked?” said Eleanor.

“Oh, none, Miss Weston. We heard him strike the rocks several times. And we are murderers.”

This conviction could not be eradicated from Miss D’Costa’s mind, and became an obsession. She would sit brooding over it for hours, and one night Eleanor, hearing footsteps mounting to the roof, was just in time to prevent her throwing herself down the cliff, in a state between somnambulism and insanity. She pleaded passionately that she might be allowed to sacrifice herself in order to avert retribution from the rest of the community, and thenceforth it was necessary to watch her carefully. She was not the only one in whom signs of mental disturbance appeared. Old quarrels were reopened, and one woman, who had a grudge of long standing against another, set to work deliberately to starve herself to death, with the amiable intention of haunting her adversary for the future.

As soon as Eleanor was able to walk, it was necessary for her also to make an expedition to the fateful village. Mai Sarah refused flatly to accompany her, but described the one house in which she had found a further store of corn, and Nāni consented to act as burden-bearer, on condition that she might bring a Bible, which she could not read, as protection against the powers of evil. Even Eleanor’s heart beat more quickly as they approached the village, after a long and toilsome climb through the snow, but this time there was no outlaw to terrify them. They found the corn Mai Sarah had seen, satisfied themselves that no more was to be discovered, and began their return journey. Suddenly a shot struck the house they were passing, and was followed by a small hailstorm of bullets.

"Down, Nāni, down!" cried Eleanor, and they threw themselves flat on the snow. The first attempt to stand up brought another bullet, and they crawled humbly into cover, pushing their burdens in front of them.

"Where can they come from?" said Eleanor, peering cautiously round the corner of a wall.

"Across the valley, Miss Sahib. There is an old fort there, and doubtless evil men have sought refuge in it. These are not the bullets of the Bala people. They must be Scythians."

"Happily they can't get across to us," said Eleanor, and they resumed their toilsome progress until a friendly rock enabled them to walk erect. The sun had softened the snow, which made their march doubly tiring, but the fact brought hope with it.

"Spring is not far off now!" thought Eleanor. "In the spring we shall be relieved. Can we hold out? We must!"

That night she reduced the adults' allowance to the smallest amount that would sustain life. A week later it was necessary to reduce the children's allowance also. Doors, bookcases, furniture, all had gone for fuel. The people had now neither strength nor energy for the outdoor exercise to which they had submitted at first, and there were no means of warming the large rooms. The minimum of daily work was done, and then each worker slunk in listlessly to join the circle round the one small brazier which could be kept alight. Following an Ethiopian custom, Eleanor had made the women sew a number of *resais* together into one large wadded quilt which covered the brazier, while they and the children sat or lay under the edges, as near as they could get to the central warmth. Thus the days passed, the people becoming less and less responsive to Eleanor's attempts to rouse them, and first one child died, then another, and two or three of the women.

Then the food failed altogether. Eleanor called for volunteers to accompany her in an attempt to reach

one of the further villages in the valley, but no one would come. She suggested going alone, and they acquiesced apathetically, but she durst not go, knowing that without her they would lie down and die without a struggle, and she remained, with the plaintive wailing of the children in her ears. After a day and night absolutely without food, she had fallen into an uneasy slumber, when a hand gripped her shoulder.

"Miss Sahib, there are Scythians below in the ravine," said Vashti.

"Scythians? not English?" cried Eleanor, starting up.

"No, Miss Sahib, they have fur coats and caps. See for yourself."

Almost too weak to stand, Eleanor climbed the steps painfully, and looked down from the roof, only to confess that she had never seen English soldiers so dressed.

"But at least they are human beings," she murmured. "They might give us something for the children to eat."

"*Aré bap*, Miss Sahib!" cried Vashti in horror. "They took away all the food we had. They fired at you and Nāni. If we trouble them, they will kill us. Let us rather pretend that there is no one here."

To Eleanor it seemed that a swift death would be merciful compared with the slow pangs of hunger, but the abject terror of the rest of the people induced her to yield to their wishes. A shivering, terrified group, they gathered behind her on the verandah, and waited in silence, straining their ears for every sound, and with eyes fixed on the gate.

"Is there any one here?" A stentorian voice shouted the question from without, and repeated it in Urdu. No one answered, the women covering the children's mouths with their *chadars* lest they should utter a sound. Eleanor could not have spoken, though some thought was trying to urge itself to her bewildered brain—something about English and Scythian. Then a child's wail, shrill and piercing, broke the silence.

Jinda had wriggled away from Nāni and given vent to her terror.

"O wretched Jinda!" breathed Topsy, superior as ever, though she had to struggle out of Joanna's grasp. "Truly thou hast brought death upon the Miss Sahib and this whole company!"

There was a murmur of voices at the gate, and the same voice as before called out, "Stand aside." There was a violent assault on the door, but it stood firm, and a shot was fired into the lock. A second attack was successful, the gate fell inwards, and the furl-clad men poured in. Eleanor took a step towards them.

"What does this mean?" she began, in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "Oh, it must be a dream," she murmured helplessly—"a hallucination!"

"Do you mean that we are not real?" said Mr Brooke's voice somewhere close by. "Try." He slipped off a great gauntlet and held out his hand, and she touched it doubtfully. "Eleanor!" he cried sharply, "what is the matter? Don't you know me? What has happened?"

"Starved," she managed to say. "No food since—How long is it?" she asked Vashti.

"The Miss Sahib and we-people have tasted nothing for two days," supplied Vashti promptly.

Mr Brooke's face changed, and his voice had grown curt. He gave several sharp orders, and the verandah became a scene of bustle. The different parts of an oil stove were produced and fitted together, and snow was collected for melting. The children watched with dull patience, until they saw tablets of compressed soup being thrown into the cauldron. Then they gathered closer, and fixed hungry, beseeching eyes on the men in charge.

"They mustn't have too much at first," said Eleanor, waking from her lethargy, and as soon as the soup was ready she became as busy as any of the rescuers in distributing it. Presently she found herself forcibly drawn aside.

"Plenty to look after them," said Mr Brooke. "Drink this."

She waved it aside with sick disgust. "I couldn't," she said.

"You must. Drink it." He fed her with a spoon as if she had been a baby. "Taking care of every one but yourself, as usual!" he said. "No, you are not to move. All your people are having quite as much as is good for them. You shall not kill yourself while I am here, at any rate. Good heavens! if I had had any idea of the state of things! But we could not get here sooner. We have been a month on the way as it is."

He spoke anxiously and jerkily, and Eleanor tried to collect her thoughts to answer him. "I knew you would come," she said at last; "but I don't know how you managed to get here so soon. "Oh!" her tears began to fall slowly, "if it could have been last week! Little Karnal Sahib died in my arms on Sunday night, crying to me for food, and there was nothing to give him."

Mr Brooke took her scarred hands, rough with the unaccustomed work of the winter, in his own. "Forgive me," he said. "Nothing should have kept me from coming up in the autumn if I had known, but the doctors were persuaded I could not move."

"You were wounded? Oh, I know it wasn't your fault. You would have come if you could. Is the war over now, then?"

"Yes, peace ought to have been signed by this time."

"Is it a good peace?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, we get a rectification of frontier and an indemnity—I doubt if we shall get that, though, for there is something very like anarchy all over Scythia. The Xipanguese get the coast province south of the Ruma which Scythia stole fifty years ago, and a protectorate over the country they have twice conquered from the Scythians."

Eleanor listened with a faint smile. "I can't

quite grasp it," she said, "but it sounds fair. And Janie?"

"Married to Arbuthnot. Are you pleased?"

"Of course. I always hoped it would be that. Do you——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said one of the rescuing party, coming up, "but the women say there is a detachment of Scythians holding out somewhere beyond the Look-out. Evidently they don't know the war is over."

"They fired at us one day when we were looking for food," said Eleanor. "I suppose they thought we were Bala people, and they are very angry with the Rajah."

"It looks as if we should have to go and take their surrender," said Mr Brooke. "The loyal messages which the Rajah sent down in the autumn promise very badly for any Scythians falling into his hands. I should like to get them on the march down before he can attack them." He gave one or two orders, and turned to Eleanor. "I must leave you for a few hours, I fear. We can't let the Rajah get out of hand again. I only wish we could make things more comfortable for you here, but we came on ahead of our transport, bringing only what we could carry ourselves. At any rate we have plenty of compressed food, and the other things ought to be up in a day or two. Or we may be able to establish connection with Sheonath."

"It doesn't signify—it's all right," said Eleanor incoherently. "But I have never thanked you—or said how glad I am to see you—or anything."

"That you may do as much as you like," he said, "but thanks are not to be mentioned. There can be no question of them between you and me. It was for my own sake I came—do you understand?"

The words were few, but they expressed more than many protestations. Eleanor sat for a few minutes where he left her, thinking them over with a happy smile. Then Miss D'Costa came softly in and kissed

her timidly, murmuring with tears that she knew how it was, and she was very, very glad for dear Miss Weston, but what would happen to St Martin's? It was a question impossible to answer at present, and Eleanor put it aside, and went to look after her charges. Mr Brooke had left two men to make themselves useful, and these, having discovered in the roof of the dismantled isolation ward a number of beams which the women had been unable to move, were getting them out to use as firewood. For most of the rescued it was sufficient happiness to sit and watch the flames, while not unconscious of the pile of emergency rations which were recklessly being converted into more soup. Two or three who were weaker than the rest refused to be banished, and lay luxuriously covered with the great quilt, while the hum of conversation waxed loud. All the inhabitants of St Martin's had of late been accommodated in the Miss Sahibs' house, both because the rooms were more easily warmed, and fewer fires were needed, so that it was easy to arrange for the relieving party to be quartered in the hospital—save in the matter of beds, since all had been used for fuel. But the two men left behind assured Eleanor that the floor could not be harder than the rocks on which they had slept for the last few nights, especially as she was able to provide them with blankets. Thus she went about busily and happily all day, and just before sunset escaped alone to the roof, hoping no one saw her. To watch for a lover was not the sort of thing her people would have expected of the Doctor Miss Sahiba, but she had provided herself with an excuse in the shape of the disinterred Union Jack. Having hoisted it triumphantly, she went up to her watch-tower and looked northwards. Coming down the road from the Look-out she could see a moving mass, which was presently hidden behind the nearer hill. Then it came in sight again.

“How much alike they all look in those fur coats!” she said to herself, with some disappointment. “I

thought I should have known him anywhere. How slowly they are coming! And they are bringing wounded with them. Can there have been fighting?"

She watched while the men came down the road and up the path and halted under the wall in the gathering dusk, one of them going forward to the gate. Without understanding, she heard the words of the man with the loud voice—it was gruff now.

"Of course they'll say they couldn't see the white flag against the snow, but any one may believe that who likes. They knew who it was before they fired."

Some one was wounded, then. Eleanor went down the steps, and came upon one of the fur-clad men speaking in low tones to Miss D'Costa and Vashti.

"He tied his handkerchief to a rifle so that it might show well against the huts, and walked out into the open space. They must have seen it. But they fired the moment he showed himself."

"And it was instantaneous?" asked the awed voice of Miss D'Costa, too much moved for tears.

"Through the heart."

Two months later, Janie and Miss D'Costa, mounted on ponies, and followed by an escort of servants and coolies, were riding down the temporarily repaired road below St Martin's, looking back at the solitary figure which waved farewell to them from the roof. When the news of Mr Brooke's death reached Ranjitgarh, Janie cast Eleanor's teachings to the winds, and recklessly informed her husband that he might say she was not to go to Burree if he liked, but she was going all the same. Arbuthnot was too wise or too sympathetic to say anything of the kind, and Janie went up to Bala under difficulties such as no Englishwoman had surmounted before her. Her fiery energy made light of the obstacles presented by snow and interrupted communications, and incited worried transport officers to get her through and be rid of her. She reached St Martin's triumphantly, and was welcomed with wild joy, for the people had become curiously afraid of the

Doctor Miss Sahiba, who went about among them to all appearance as usual, but with a shadow in her eyes that made the children shrink from her. To Eleanor her coming brought the blessed relief of tears. Silent sympathy was impossible to Janie, and she had much to tell of Mr Brooke's doings and his kindness during the past two years. She it was who put into words the thought that had occurred to most of those who heard of his death. "If it had only been in the war, I could have borne it; but when peace had actually been signed, to be killed by accident, as it were—through some one's fright or carelessness!"

Eleanor answered her with difficulty. "No, I can bear it, because there is that one day to look back upon. I can realise now what Heaven is like."

But though Janie could comfort, she could not prevail upon Eleanor to leave St Martin's, as she and others thought she ought to do. Since the day of the relief, she had insisted on flying the Union Jack from the roof regularly from dawn to sunset. Dr Weaver, who had resumed his supervision of the mission, and feared that the hospital would become identified in the minds of the people with British rather than Christian influence, remonstrated, and Eleanor listened to his arguments, but kept the flag flying. With some natural resentment, he told Janie that it was clear Dr Weston was allowing that sad affair to prey on her mind, and it would be well for her to take her overdue furlough at once. But Eleanor refused.

"You understand, I know, Janie," she said. "If I went home, I should have to talk about this two years, and every one would ask all sorts of questions. But I lived through it in the confidence that I should see him at the end, and now I have to arrange my life over again without the expectation. I can't go among people until I have accustomed myself to it."

"Then come back with me to Ranjitgarh," suggested Janie hopefully, but without much expectation of success. "There is so much to do in Granthistan, Burree. If you could only see Nanakpur and all the other towns!

In some places one can hardly find one's way about, all the landmarks seem swept away—what with the war and street fights and incendiarism. And of course mission property has suffered even worse than other public buildings—churches and schools and hospitals all gone. And our people, Burree—our poor scattered Christians—just beginning to find their way back to their old homes, and crying for joy when they see their missionaries again! And the orphans, and the poor maimed, starved creatures who come out of hiding-places, and the awful stories they have to tell! One hears now what happened to some of the people who were not rescued in time."

"At least," said Eleanor, with unwonted grimness, "the Christians will hardly prefer the Scythians to us after this."

"It was not only the Scythians," said Janie. "I heard Jock's chief say that it had taken fifty years to put a little of the fear of God into the tribes, and that in eighteen months they had learnt lessons which it would take another fifty years to knock out of their heads."

"A chance for a new generation of Nicholsons and Lawrences. The old men have saved India in this war; now it is for the young men to show whether they can keep it."

"And so," went on Janie, "you see how much there is to do. Everything has simply to be built up again from the beginning. And you could help so much!"

"But isn't there plenty to do here, Janie? We have to build up everything again too. As soon as the coolies can bring up the wood I shall set the builders to work. And if there are not so many patients as before, you see how they are bringing in orphans every day. Unless we can transfer them to one of the Granthistan stations, I shall have to think of getting a properly trained schoolmistress. No lack of work, you see!"

Janie listened sympathetically, but her heart sank, for how could she leave Eleanor alone at St Martin's?

She scolded herself afterwards for her feeling of depression.

"When I ought only to be glad to see my poor darling Burree taking an interest in things again!" she mused. "How can I be such a wretch? I know I was horrid to Burree once because I said she and I ought to be enough to one another without thinking about men, but now, somehow, things here feel so small. Two years ago it would have seemed frightfully important that Jinda's frocks are getting atrociously short and there are only two whole sheets in the hospital, but now I know Vashti is quite hurt because she believed I didn't care a bit when she showed me them this morning. I thought I heard Jock say, in his lordly, absurd way, 'Why, get new ones, of course!' instead of talking about letting down hems and taking out worn pieces, and it nearly made me cry. Oh, I do wish I could hear him say it!"

Janie was thoroughly and unexpectedly miserable. She had thought it would be quite easy and natural to settle down once more in her old place at St Martin's, and the wild impatience she felt to see her husband again astonished her. She was living upon his letters, in which she read in every line how much he missed her, though they always ended with the charge that she must not think of coming down as long as Miss Weston wanted her. It was bad enough when he was helpless, but now that he was beginning to get stronger it became intolerable to be away from him.

"After all, I shall not be obliged to inflict my whole weight on you whenever I want to walk a few steps," she read, two days after her talk with Eleanor. "The new crutches have come, and I am practising diligently to astonish you when you get back. I managed the whole length of our verandah this morning, and think of surprising old Saundersfoot with a call at his office tomorrow. Will you believe your eyes if I walk on to the platform to meet you when you come? That puts it a horribly long way off, though.

My pride in these achievements doesn't extend to wishing you any longer away. If you came back to-night I believe the crutches would have a rest until you got tired of taking me about."

Jock was becoming accustomed to manage without her! That was the comfort the unreasonable Janie derived from his letter, and it nearly broke her heart. How she had looked forward to superintending his first steps on the new crutches that were to do so much for him! But now, when she returned, he would be able to go about by himself, like other people's husbands, and would no longer be exclusively dependent on her. She cried over the letter until it struck her suddenly that she was really grudging him his partial restoration to health, and then she called herself names and wrote to confess her unkindness to him, only begging him pathetically not to get quite well before she came back. But the letter was never sent, owing to what Janie thought must be a species of telepathy on Eleanor's part, though her own woe-begone aspect, with its ineffectual veil of heroic resolution, was enough to show any person of ordinary insight the state of the case.

"Janie, I am ashamed of myself to have kept you from your husband so long. He has been most kind about it, but it is not fair to him. I shall send you down with the road-making party next week."

This sudden release took Janie's breath away, and at first she refused to accept it, but Eleanor swept away her objections, which at best were half-hearted.

"How can you possibly manage all alone?"

"When you are restored to your poor patient husband, I shall send for my niece Nelly to join me."

"But perhaps Mr Weston won't let her come, as the country is so disturbed."

"He will if he knows she is needed here."

"After all, he has seven of them," said Janie in her old maladroitness way.

"If you asked him, he would tell you that our

family gives its women as well as its men to the Empire," said Eleanor.

"Of course I'll meet her at Bombay," said Janie, anxious to atone; "and Jock and I will bring her up here, and be paying guests at St Martin's for the hot weather. They will have made the road practicable for tongas by that time."

When it was once settled that Eleanor should remain at St Martin's, the details proved unexpectedly easy of arrangement. Pending Nelly's arrival, she was to have the company of Sister Lawson, who had been discovered by the eagle eye of Sister M'Kay to be contemplating that most heinous crime in the nurse's calendar, a break-down. A travelling companion for Janie appeared at the same time in the person of Miss D'Costa, who was merely leaving temporarily on a visit to her relatives. As she rode down the track, she impressed upon Janie that she would never have left dear Miss Weston even for an hour, had it not been for the strong representations of her family. They were such a united family, and never before had one of them been absent for two whole years from the family home. Janie answered mechanically, and wished that Miss D'Costa would not say "familee." She herself was going down again into the rush and bustle attending the rise of the new Granthistan on the ruins of the old, and home life and love and duties awaited her there, but quiet little St Martin's could never cease to be dear to her. Her heart turned joyfully to the approaching meeting with her husband, but not even in the thought of him could she forget the solitary figure of Eleanor on her watch-tower, with the flag drooping above her, and behind her the mountain peaks that guarded the forbidden country.

The war was over—as usual entered upon without preparation and marked by "unfortunate incidents." The only gainer from it so far appeared to be Hercynia, who remained as strong in herself as before, and infinitely more powerful for mischief, owing to the

exhaustion of both Britain and Scythia. But there was the possibility of a moral gain for which even the widows and orphans at home, and in India the destruction of the work of generations and the raising of passions which it would take years to allay, were not too high a price. The fleet could not defend the line of the Himalayas and Hindu Kush; it could not even steam up to Payab. Would the enthusiasm for military reform and for national military training survive the crisis that had called it forth, or prove—as on all previous occasions—as evanescent as the devil's religious aspirations? Would the average Briton realise that holding the keys of Empire was not a summer day's pastime, nor a charge to be delegated to a few men at a distance, but a trust the burden of which must be borne by every man and woman in the country? On the answer to these questions it depended whether the island in the North Seas could maintain her claim to be the mother of an imperial race.

THE END.



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